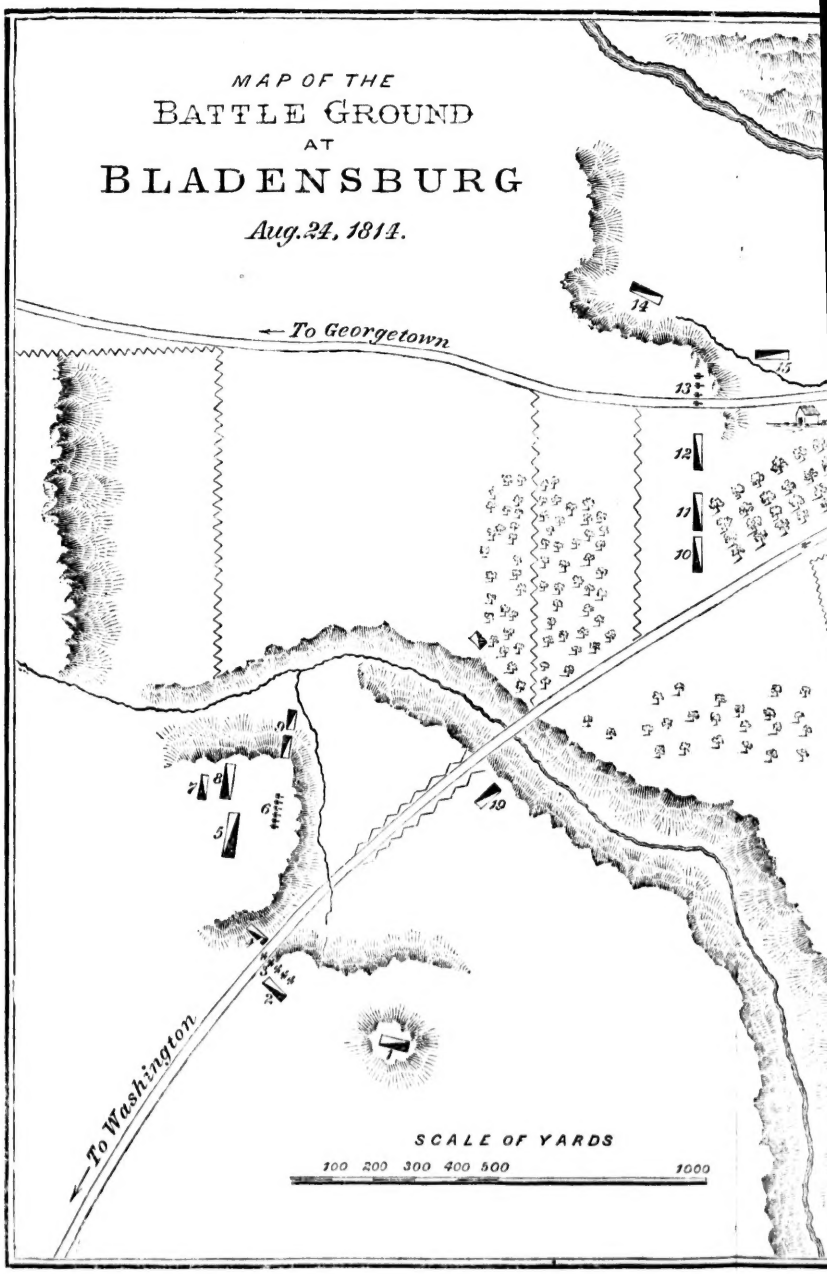
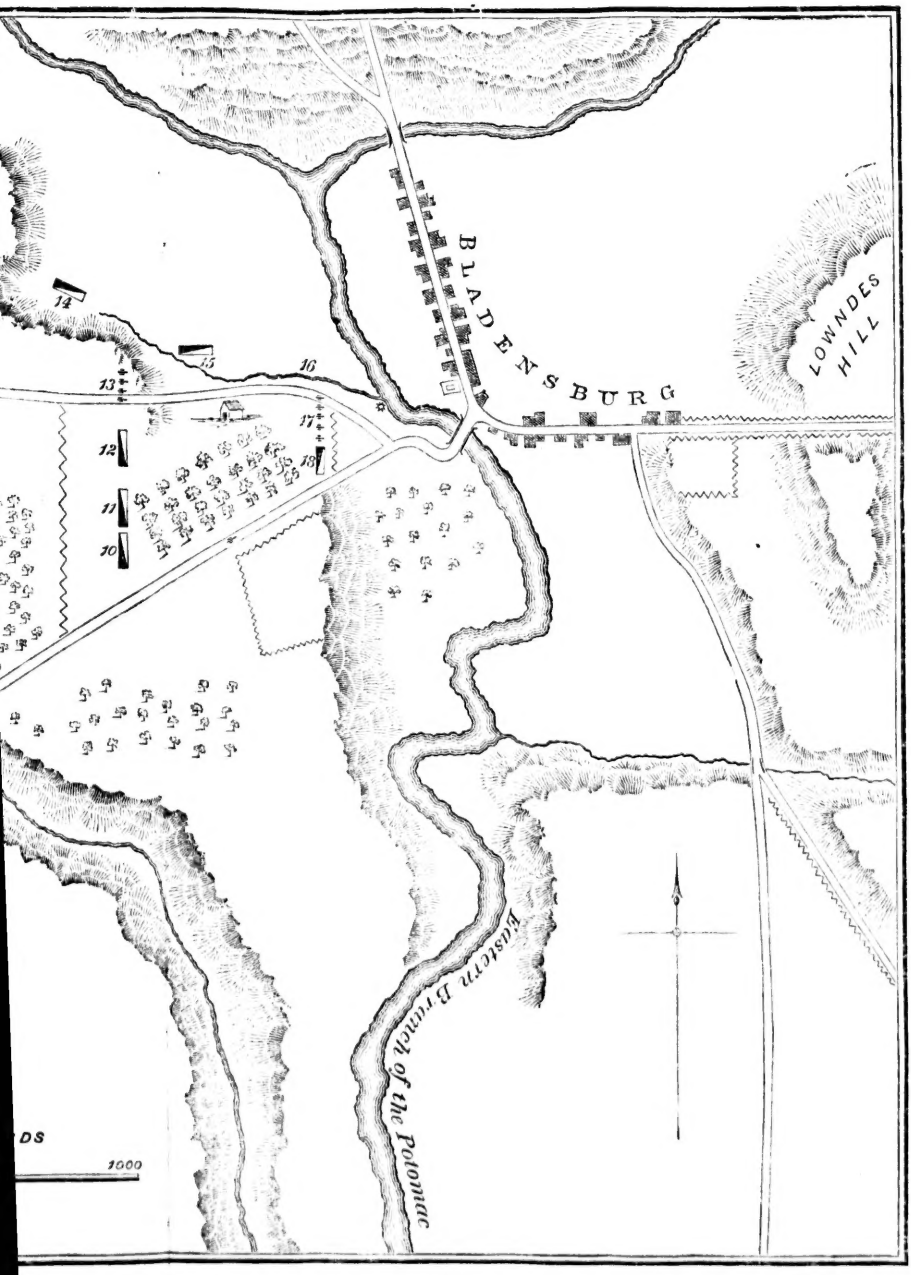


1 Col. Beall's Regiment.
2 Sailors and Marines.
3 Barney's Battery.
4 1st Reg't of Smith's Brigade.
5 2d Reg't of Smith's Brigade.
6 Major Peter's Battery.
7 Major Waring's Battalion.
8 Lt.-col. Scott's Reg't Regulars.
9 Stull's and Davidson's Co
10 Stansbury's Brigade—Ra
Regiment. [Regim
11 Stansbury's Brigade—Sh



9 Stull's and Davidson's Comp's.
10 Stansbury's Brigade—Ragan's Regiment.
11 Stansbury's Brigade—Shutz's [Regiment.
12 5th Reg't Baltimore Volunteers.
13 Capt. Burch's Artillery.
14 The Cavalry.
15 Capt. Doughty's Company.
16 2 Comp's Militia and 1 of Rifles.
17 The Baltimore Artillery.
18 Major Pinkney's Riflemen.
19 Lieut.-col. Kramer's Battalion.

HISTORY

OF

THE INVASION AND CAPTURE

OF

WASHINGTON,

AND OF

THE EVENTS WHICH PRECEDED AND FOLLOWED.

BY JOHN S. WILLIAMS,

BRIGADE MAJOR AND INSPECTOR, COLUMBIAN BRIGADE, IN THE WAR OF 1812.

NEW YORK:

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TO

COL. WILLIAM W. SEATON.

My dear Colonel,—The practice of dedication, like many other pleasant customs of the olden time, which tended to check the growth of cold and selfish feelings, has become so nearly obsolete that I have had some hesitation in giving way to my impulses on this occasion. I have doubted whether it would be at all agreeable to you to be implicated in any thing that smacked so much of "*old-fogyism.*" But, independently of the dictates of my feelings, there appeared to me so many good and appropriate reasons why this volume should be dedicated to you, that I will run the risk of taking your consent for granted. I know of no one to whom the work is more likely to prove interesting, or who will be better able to judge of the accuracy of its statements, and at the same time more disposed to view its faults with lenity, knowing that they have not proceeded from any intention to misrepresent facts, or a willingness to asperse the fame of living or dead. The work, too, relates to the most important event in the history of the city over which you so long presided with so much honor to yourself

and advantage to your fellow-citizens as chief magistrate, and with that event you were personally connected, both as combatant on the ill-fated field and as a sufferer by the destruction of property in the city. Taking all these reasons into consideration, I think you will at least excuse your old companion in arms for publicly offering you this testimonial of his esteem and friendship.

J. S. WILLIAMS.

WASHINGTON, Oct 1, 1856.

PREFACE.

THE primary motive by which the author of this work was actuated in getting together the materials from which it has been composed, was the hope of being able to do something to remove the obloquy which, in his opinion, has been undeservedly cast upon the American troops engaged in the battle of Bladensburg. It is true that this obloquy, being shared among so many, was never very severely felt by any individual among them. This, indeed, is the reason why it was so easily thrown upon them in the first instance, and why it has been suffered so long to continue. It was not the business of any one of the crowd, more than of another, to expose the injustice of the imputation cast upon them; and as "what is every body's busisess is nobody's business," the duty has never yet been discharged. If the troops, as a body, could have called for a court of inquiry into their conduct, and had counsel of ordinary ability to defend them, or if they could have had a voice in the selection of the committee appointed by Congress to investigate the causes of the capture of the City of Washington, there would probably have been no necessity for undertaking a work like the present, or, rather, the necessity would have been transferred to those high dignitaries of the nation whose complacency was not at all

disturbed, nor intended to be disturbed, by the non-committal report made by the committee actually appointed.

It may be asked, Why, after the lapse of more than forty years, seek to disturb an arrangement which is admitted to be the most *comfortable* that could have been made—that is, the one which inflicted the least pain upon individuals? The troops generally were little inconvenienced by the obloquy, and went about their business as unconcernedly as if nothing had happened; whereas, if public censure had been concentrated upon a few powerful party leaders, their wrath and that of their partisans might have thrown the country into an uproar.

It might seem Pharisaical to profess an abstract love of truth, and not imperatively necessary to contend for it as an essential ingredient in history. If works of fiction or parables are written for the purpose of moral instruction, and are found to answer that purpose, why should truth be considered an essential ingredient in history? or why should any more of such a precious ingredient be used than is necessary to give a flavor of probability?

But moral instruction is not the sole object of history, which furnishes, or ought to furnish, valuable lessons in the art of government and art of war, and these lessons can not be so well learned from imaginary events as from a faithful statement of real occurrences. National disasters, too, are often more pregnant with instruction than national successes, and more may sometimes be learned from a defeat well studied than from half a dozen victories; and in this

respect a correct narrative of the battle of Bladensburg, and of the events preceding and attending it, might be considered as highly important and desirable.

It fortunately happens that the means of compiling a correct narrative of this battle are unusually abundant—perhaps more so, owing to fortuitous circumstances, than with respect to any similar event in history. The event took place among a reading and inquiring people. It was not only sufficiently extraordinary in itself to arouse the strongest curiosity as to its causes and details, but it was deeply wounding to the pride of the nation. A prompt investigation by Congress was a matter of course, and this inquiry had, at least, the effect of calling forth a mass of evidence, in the shape of statements and official reports from individuals prominently connected with the event, which may be considered as having all the solemnity and credibility of testimony before a judicial tribunal, and which, however conflicting on some points, yet furnish the means, upon patient study and comparison, of arriving at a correct knowledge of the material facts. This fund of information has since been increased by various publications, including narratives of British writers. Probably, at this date, little of importance relating to the subject remains to be revealed to the public, except what may be contained in the manuscript papers of Mr. Madison, now in possession of Colonel Peter Force, of the City of Washington. Having been informed that these papers contained some very interesting matter in relation to the capture of the seat of government, we applied to Colonel Force for permission to consult them, stating to him the deep interest

which we took in the subject. With his usual courtesy he complied with our request, granting us access to the papers as often as we pleased, for the purpose of perusal and study, but declining to allow any portion of them to be transcribed. We gladly availed ourselves of the privilege, and the information thus obtained will appear in its proper place in the following pages.

To the sources of information above-mentioned, and to the author's own personal knowledge of events which he witnessed, he has been enabled to add recent statements from some of those whose position at the time of the capture of the seat of government, and whose high standing in the community at present, give a deep interest to the written communications with which they have favored him. Among these are letters from the Hon. Richard Rush, a member of Mr. Madison's cabinet, and the venerable Major George Peter, of Montgomery County, Maryland, commander of the District Light Corps, which will be found in the Appendix. Other communications of a similar character, which have been useful to us in preparing the work, are omitted, in order that the bulk of the volume might not be unnecessarily increased.

We will here take occasion to remark, in justice both to the living and the dead, that in any reflections which we have been tempted to indulge in on the conduct of Mr. Madison's administration, we have had no intention, and certainly not the slightest inclination, to include Mr. Rush, who was Attorney-general at the time, nor Mr. Campbell, then Secretary of the Treasury. We are well satisfied that neither of them, either

from his position in the administration or from his personal character, was likely to be connected with any plans or movements which had not for their sole and exclusive object the welfare and honor of their country.

It has been our purpose, in compiling a history of the campaign of Washington, to resort as often as practicable to the language of the principal witnesses, and make such use of their testimony that, if the reader is not satisfied with the views which we have taken of the subject, he may substitute other views of his own for them, based upon the facts which we have presented, with an assurance that we have neither designedly omitted, nor presented in a deceptive manner, any information necessary for the formation of a correct judgment. This will account for the multitude of extracts and quotations in the work.

Different persons will draw a different moral from the same story. The moral which we are disposed to draw from the history of the battle of Bladensburg is, not that Americans were too "pusillanimous" to defend their seat of government, and that, therefore, it would be safer to hire an army of foreign mercenaries to defend it for us; nor that militia troops are not to be depended upon and therefore a large standing army of regular troops is necessary; but that politicians of the fairest fame require watching, and will not hesitate to sacrifice or jeopard the interests and honor of their country in order to advance themselves or ruin a rival. We present in this book the grounds which we think justify us in deducing this moral; and, as we believe them sufficient, we have not hesitated to express our

opinion in plain terms, without respect to the rank or reputation of the eminent individuals implicated. We do not understand—though the Congressional Committee of Investigation did—why truths which may benefit the public, and which the public have a right to know, should be suppressed, or cautiously and fearfully hinted at, rather than boldly spoken, in order to spare any individual reputation or fame, if it were as "sacrosanct" as that of General Washington himself. Nor do we think that men who did not hesitate to calumniate others in order to screen themselves have any claim, however exalted their position in history, to be treated with reverence or profound respect by any of those upon whom their unfounded imputations were cast.

The reader will observe that we have made a distinction between the author and the editor or compiler of this volume. The person who originated the idea or plan of the work, and who sought out and furnished the materials from which it has been compiled, may properly be termed the author of it. At his request, the literary execution of it was undertaken by a friend, now no more, whose progress in the work was much impeded by other more imperative calls upon his time, and who had not advanced farther than the seventh chapter of the present volume, when his death occasioned a suspension of the work. One of his sons, however, undertook the completion of the undertaking. This will account for the difference between the style of the first seven chapters of the work and that of the subsequent portion. Some change, also, which took place in the plan of the work, and the fact that the

first portion of it had not been revised by the writer, rendered it necessary to make alterations, which, it is feared, have rendered the whole production inferior, as a literary composition, to what it would have been had the able pen which commenced it been permitted to continue it to the end.

Washington, August, 1856.

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INVASION AND CAPTURE

OF

WASHINGTON.

CHAPTER I.

Shadows of forthcoming Events.—Apparent Indifference of Congress and the Administration to the Signs of the Times.

More than fifteen months before the actual invasion of the District of Columbia, the enemy had plainly indicated their design to maintain a sufficient force in the Chesapeake Bay to control its commerce. They had repeatedly landed marauding parties on both its shores; the town of Havre de Grace on the western, and Frenchtown, Georgetown, and Fredericktown on the eastern shore of Maryland, and Hampton and other places in Virginia, had all been attacked, pillaged, and burned; many of their inhabitants had been killed, and many had been carried off to their ships of war as prisoners. Maryland and Virginia, it is well known, both border on the District of Columbia, and the towns which have been named as the scenes of the enemy's destructive operations may be said to be in the immediate neighborhood of the seat of government.

These were indications deemed by almost every intelligent and prudent citizen, except those directly

connected with the government, sufficiently strong to excite apprehensions that the enemy contemplated an attack also upon the City of Washington. On the 15th of July, 1813, a few days before the adjournment of Congress, and while the House of Representatives were sitting with closed doors upon a message from the President of the United States, which had been suggested by the presence of the enemy in the Bay, General Philip Stuart, a member from Maryland, a veteran soldier, who bore the scars of numerous honorable wounds received in our Revolutionary battles, a fearless, calm, dispassionate observer of passing events, and one, therefore, not likely to sound the alarm when no cause for it existed, introduced a preamble and resolution in the following words:

"*Whereas* the seat of government, from the unprepared and defenseless state of the District of Columbia, is in imminent danger, if an attack should be made thereon; and *whereas* the fleet of the enemy is understood to be within a few hours' sail of the capital; and *whereas* the immense value of public property exposed to destruction, the great value of the public records, and other deeply interesting considerations, render it peculiarly important that any invasion of the metropolis should be met with vigor and successfully repelled, whereupon

"*Resolved*, That, in the opinion of this House, a distribution of such arms as are in the possession of the government within the District of Columbia should be immediately made, to be placed in the hands of all able-bodied men within the district willing to be embodied to perform military duty, and also in the hands

of such members of this House as may be willing to receive them, to act against the enemy in any manner not incompatible with their public duties."*

The words of this resolution show that its mover, at least, expected an early invasion, and the preamble discloses the ground of that expectation—"*the fleet of the enemy is* understood to be *within a few hours' sail of the capital.*" But it had been so from the previous month of April. Other places in the vicinity of the capital had been invaded, and Washington had been undisturbed. This was the delusive ground of argument: the enemy did not follow up their successful inroads upon Havre de Grace and the other towns by an immediate attempt against the Federal City, and therefore it formed no part of their design to invade it at any time. It was admirable logic, it must be confessed.

The first question raised upon the introduction of this preamble and resolution was whether the discussion of the subject required *secrecy*; and this "passed in the affirmative." The next vote taken was to lay the matter "on the table," and this "was determined in the negative—yeas 64, nays 74." A motion to strike out the preamble was then made and carried, and the naked resolution was committed to the "Committee on Military Affairs." On the following day, before it was possible, in the nature of things, that any personal examination on the part of the committee of the preparations for defence, even within the city itself, could have been accomplished, and much less the whole district and the numerous approaches to it, the

* Annals of Congress, 13th Congress, *in die.*

chairman of that committee made the following report:

"The Committee on Military Affairs, to whom was referred a resolution of yesterday having relation to the present movement of the enemy, report,

"That they have examined into the state of preparation, naval and military, made to receive the enemy, and are satisfied that the preparations are, in every respect, adequate to the emergence, and that no measures are necessary on the part of this House to make it more complete."

That this committee, within the time that intervened between the close of one day's session and the opening of the next, could have made a personal inspection of the naval and military strength of the city, is altogether beyond credibility. The report was, therefore, little less than an insult to the common sense of the House. The chairman, it may be, "examined" the secretaries of the two departments of War and the Navy, and received assurances from those officers respectively that every preparation for defence had been made; but ought this, under the circumstances, to have "satisfied" the committee?

The reader will observe that there are here two opinions expressed, diametrically opposite in their nature, and both advanced with equal confidence and boldness in the face of the world by persons whose means and opportunities of obtaining correct information were alike ample and authoritative. The one asserts that the seat of government, "from the *unprepared and defenceless* state of the District of Columbia, is in *imminent danger*, if an attack should be

made thereon;" the other, that the state of preparation for defence "is, *in every respect, adequate to the* emergence."

It is impossible that any two persons of ordinary capacity should have differed so widely as to the actual state of preparations in the district to defend the seat of government; these discordant opinions, therefore, must have been formed from the different light in which their respective entertainers viewed the probability of "*an attack*." On the supposition that the enemy did not contemplate an invasion of the District of Columbia, it was very natural to believe that no *measures* were necessary on the part of the House to render the preparations for defence "more complete." But the question for history is, were the means of defence, naval and military, such as to give a reasonable assurance that they would prove sufficient to repel the enemy "if an attack should be made?" And history itself answers this question in the negative; for, even after the lapse of more than a year from this time, during which some additions had been made to what were regarded as preparations for defense, the enemy *did* make an attack, which, unhappily, was *not* repelled.

On the 20th of the same month in which the proceedings just mentioned took place, in the secret session of the House of Representatives, the President of the United States transmitted to Congress a message which, as it is short, and contains, as we think, a clew to the very extraordinary report of the Military Committee, is here presented to the reader without abridgment.

"*Confidential.*—To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States: There being sufficient ground to infer that it is the purpose of the enemy to combine with the blockade of our ports special license to neutral vessels, or to British vessels in neutral disguise, whereby they may draw from our country the precise kinds and quantity of exports essential to their wants, whilst its general commerce remains obstructed; keeping in view also the invidious discrimination between different ports of the United States; and as such a system, if not counteracted, will have the effect of diminishing very materially the pressure of the war on the enemy, and encouraging a perseverance in it, at the same time that it will leave the general commerce of the United States under all the pressure the enemy can impose, thus subjecting the whole to British regulation, in subserviency to British monopoly; I recommend to the consideration of Congress the expediency of an immediate and effectual prohibition of exports, limited to a convenient day in their next session, and removable in the mean time in the event of a cessation of the blockade of our ports.

"JAMES MADISON.

"Washington, July 20, 1813."

A comparison of the tenor of this message with the report of the Committee on Military Affairs, immediately preceding it, would seem to render it manifest that both were the offspring of the same delusion. Both seem to have been dictated by the conviction that the enemy, though at that moment within a few hours' sail of the seat of government, had no intention what-

ever, either then or at any later period, of attempting an expedition against it. In both cases, indeed, the delusive and unstatesmanlike opinion seemed to have prevailed, that a hostile invasion of the District of Columbia, through the instrumentality of the British squadron in Chesapeake Bay, was not within the range of possibility. Otherwise, it is inconceivable on what grounds it could have been asserted, on the one hand, that the defences of the District wanted nothing to their completeness, or why, on the other hand, the attention of Congress should be called only to the commercial evils which would be likely to result from the continued blockade of our ports.

If it had been an ascertained, indisputable fact, about which there could be no difference of opinion, that the enemy meant to limit their operations in the Chesapeake to the regulation and control of the commerce of which it was the channel, then, indeed, the measure recommended by the President might have been regarded as the most appropriate and suitable one to counteract the design; but, to say the least, it may be doubted whether the mere assumption of such a fact, and that, too, against strongly-expressed views of a different character, could justify him in his silence as to other than commercial interests in equal want of protection, and which would be in equal jeopardy if assailed. It would certainly have been safer and wiser, and more consonant with a due regard to the general welfare, to have taken into account the possibility, at least, that the enemy might have more extensive designs than those which were apparent to every body.

It can not be considered extraordinary that individ-

uals should differ in opinion as to the probability or improbability of any occurrence yet in the womb of time, but it is passing strange that men of equal discernment, having equal capacity to examine and inquire, and equal authority to draw information from the same sources, should come to opposite conclusions as to a simple question of fact—that is, whether there existed or did not exist in the District of Columbia any evidence of preparation to resist an invading enemy. If the Military Committee of the House of Representatives had said, in so many words, We have reason to believe that the enemy now in the Chesapeake Bay have not the remotest idea or intention of invading the District, and therefore we can not conceive that there exists any necessity for providing means of defence, their report might have been regarded as kindly designed to relieve the House from all apprehension as to their own safety; but when, in speaking of "the state of preparation, naval and military," they make the unqualified assertion "that no measures are necessary on the part of the House to make it *more* complete," they can be understood in no other way than as meaning to say that they had found it, upon examination, to be *already complete*. This understanding of it imposes upon us the necessity of inquiring into the correctness or incorrectness of this implied affirmation.

At the moment that this report was made, it was a fact notorious to every inhabitant of the District of Columbia, and which ought to have been equally so to Congress, that the only fortification, so called, on the Potomac River, from its embouchure into the Chesapeake Bay up to the seat of government on its banks,

had not more than a brace of guns mounted, nor men enough to serve more if they had been mounted. It was a fortification in name only, not prepared to have repulsed even the smallest of the enemy's vessels, had an attempt been made to pass it. At the mouth of the Anacostia, or eastern branch of the Potomac, where there now stands an arsenal, surrounded by a neat embattled wall, there was then nothing but an unprotected magazine. From that point to the Navy Yard there was not a gun of any description to present even a show of defence, while at the yard itself a few artificers and laborers, and still fewer marines, constituted the sole means of protection.

Such was "the state of preparation" on the approaches to the seat of government by water. The defences on the land routes were in no respect "more complete." Throughout the whole boundary-line of the District of Columbia there was not a single point fortified; not a redoubt, dike, or ditch; not a solitary piece of artillery; not a single battalion of regular soldiers; not one company of militia or volunteers properly armed, equipped, and disciplined.

The neglect to take advantage of the full opportunity allowed by the enemy, and, it may be added, of the long warning given by them, to place the seat of government in a condition to have defied the utmost force and skill of attack, is utterly incomprehensible to plain common sense. There was not an inhabitant of the District, whether farmer, merchant, mechanic, or laborer, who did not know that the city was totally destitute of defences, and who did not believe in the probability of an invasion. The President and his ministers,

and their friends in Congress, alone entertained a different opinion, and, unfortunately, these were the authorities in whom was vested, by the law and Constitution, the sole power of making the necessary preparations.

We dwell upon the treatment which General Stuart's resolutions received longer than it may be thought to deserve, but we do so because we believe that to that treatment may be traced all the misfortunes of the 24th of August, 1814. The necessity of resorting to any measures of preparation was not admitted by Congress or the administration, because, as already intimated, they did not believe that the enemy entertained the remotest design of attempting an invasion of the District of Columbia. By what process of reasoning, or by what unknown facts their minds were brought to this conviction, we do not pretend to know, and will not venture to guess. Whether the Congress imbibed their belief from the President, or whether the latter trusted so implicitly to the prudence and judgment of the former as to deem it unnecessary to bring to their notice what he took it for granted would not escape their foresight, is a question the discussion of which perhaps would be more curious than useful. It is enough to know that both the one and the other labored under a most unhappy delusion, or were guilty of gross negligence and indifference.

The House of Representatives promptly acted upon the message of the President, and complied with his recommendations by passing a bill laying an embargo upon all ships and vessels in the ports and harbors of the United States: a measure which, if his limited view of the enemy's intentions had been correct, would

probably have been the most judicious that could have been devised to counteract them. The Senate, however, entertained a different idea, and did not concur in the proposed embargo. So far, then, as the protection or defence of the District of Columbia was concerned, nothing was done during that session of Congress, which terminated on the 2d of August, 1813, three days after the Senate had announced their non-concurrence in the bill of the House of Representatives.

The fact that within a few days after the next meeting of Congress, which took place on the 6th of December, 1813, the President renewed with better success his recommendation of embargo, and again omitted all allusion to any other measure as being called for by the existing state of things, clearly shows that nothing had occurred during the four months of recess to change his view as to the exclusive purpose of the enemy in holding possession of Chesapeake Bay. Though parties of the troops from their ships of war had been daily committing depredations upon the neighboring shores of Maryland and Virginia, the apprehension that their inroads might, sooner or later, extend to the District of Columbia does not seem yet to have entered into his mind.

CHAPTER II.

The same subject continued.

SCARCELY had there been time allowed for the embargo act of the 17th of December, 1813, to reach the more remote ports and harbors of the United States, before the chairman of the Committee of Foreign Relations introduced a bill to repeal it. On the 3d of April, Mr. Calhoun presented a bill to that effect, taking that occasion to address the House in one of his happiest strains of eloquence and argument. The principal ground for the measure now proposed was, that the embargo and non-importation acts were utterly incompatible with the avowed objects of the war, which had been declared for the purpose of defending and maintaining the principles of "free trade and sailors' rights." The wrongs and outrages committed by the enemy were scarcely more abhorrent or destructive of this principle than was the operation of a system which compelled our ships and vessels to lie and rot in port, while it deprived our seamen of their only means of subsistence.

The same argument had been frequently before urged by the opponents of the restrictive system, when it was first proposed and adopted; and it now, of course, met with their hearty concurrence, while, at the same time, it furnished them a fair opportunity of exultation—which they did not fail to seize—at this acknowledged endorsement of their opinions.

But, in addition to this all-sufficient reason for the proposed repeal of the embargo and non-importation acts, the distinguished statesman who introduced the bill urged another consideration, which had influenced his own opinions, and which, he thought, would be regarded as a powerful motive in the decision of the House. This was the entire change which had recently taken place in the circumstances of the European belligerents. All Europe, which had been so long shut against the commerce which constituted the vital breath of our enemy, was now open to them; and our restrictive system, which, as auxiliary to that of other countries, pressed severely upon them, would, in the changed relations of those countries, press more heavily upon ourselves than upon Great Britain. It is with the statement of the fact upon which this last argument is founded that our subject has any thing to do.

Here is proof that the change in the relative condition of the belligerent powers in Europe was known in this country so early as the 6th of April, 1814—more than four months before the invasion and capture of the City of Washington; and the statesman must have wilfully closed his eyes to passing occurrences who did not see the cause of that change. No public man or politician of that day could be excusable if he remained in ignorance of the fact that almost every arrival from Europe brought information of some new success of the allied armies, of which that of our enemy constituted one. The colossal power of France, which had, for twenty years, not merely withstood the attacks of all Europe, but had actually

waxed greater and greater by their results, was now seen to be tottering to its fall. Notwithstanding a few occasional slight reverses, the Allies were known to be every where gaining ground, and though a few enthusiasts still affected to believe in the invincibility of Napoleon, no one doubted that the war in Europe would soon be at an end.

The great statesman was right in bringing forward this argument in support of his bill for the repeal of the embargo and non-importation acts. So long as all Europe was shut against the products and manufactures of England, and these acts remained in force, she would necessarily feel with greater severity the effect of that seclusion; and so far they might be considered good war measures on the part of the United States. But even this was thought doubtful by many wise politicians, inasmuch as it compelled Great Britain, in her own defence, to seize upon all the channels of commerce in the United States, and thus secure to herself the opportunity of seducing our citizens to engage in an illicit trade with her—an opportunity by which, as the President had informed Congress, she did not fail to profit to the fullest extent. It was the only means she possessed of forcing a market, out of her own colonies, and if an inference may be drawn from the several acts passed by Congress to prohibit the use of British licenses or passes, and the conclusive ransoming of vessels and cargoes, it may be assumed that her actual blockades produced for her more than a compensation for the restrictive system. All Europe being again opened to her, the blockades were kept up only against the United States, and were the

more rigorously enforced, as obedience to the order of their government, on the part of the officers intrusted with them, was rewarded by considerable pecuniary gains to the latter.

But what is most of all remarkable and difficult of comprehension in this state of things is that neither the President, nor the enlightened and far-seeing statesman at the head of the Committee of Foreign Relations, though well aware of the change in the circumstances of Europe, seems to have thought of the possible effect which that change might produce in the conduct of the war that Great Britain was separately waging against the United States.

Was the apprehension, which we have seen was entertained by many observant and reflecting individuals, that some of the British troops, left without employment in Europe, would be forthwith sent to aid in a more vigorous prosecution of the war on this continent, regarded as too chimerical to deserve the notice of statesmen? Was there any thing unreasonable or far-fetched in such an anticipation? It is true, the government of the United States had accepted the offered mediation of the Emperor of Russia, and had sent envoys extraordinary to Europe with commissions to treat of the terms of peace with those who might be appointed on the part of Great Britain, if she also should accept the mediation. But, though the President had reason to believe she would accept that mediation, she had not yet done so, and it is manifest, from his various messages to Congress on the subject of the war, that this consideration did not influence him to believe in the expediency of neglecting any means

that might be deemed necessary for carrying it out with the same vigilance and energy as if no negotiations for peace had been thought of. In this, perhaps, it may be thought that he did all which his duty required him to do, and that the whole blame of not making the proper preparations to put the District of Columbia in a complete state of defence ought properly to rest upon Congress. But, on the other hand, it may be said that the District of Columbia was more peculiarly under the guardianship of the President than any other portion of the United States. Here was the seat of government, of which he was the head, and the condition of which, as it regarded the existing state of warfare, he must be supposed to have had better opportunities of forming a correct opinion of than the body of Congress. They would, from these considerations, naturally wish to be informed by him that additional defences were deemed necessary before they instituted any legislative proceedings concerning them. As he gave them no such information, they had a right, perhaps, to take it for granted that no inquiries on the subject, by them or their committees, would be expedient or proper.

But, though the President had not only omitted to recommend any special measures for the protection and defense of the District of Columbia, but had left Congress to infer from his message that the sole object of the enemy's ships of war in its vicinity was to regulate and control the commerce of the cities and ports on the waters of the Chesapeake Bay, yet he had, during their session of the previous year, communicated to them various documents, proving beyond a

question that the ships had numerous troops on board; that these troops had landed, in larger or smaller parties, at various towns and villages in Maryla and Virginia; had pillaged and destroyed large amounts of private property; and had killed or carried off as prisoners of war many, not only of the organized militia, but non-combatant citizens. The District of Columbia, it was well known to every body, was almost as easily within their reach as the places actually invaded and made desolate, and, as the enemy well knew, was quite as defenceless. These facts were quite as well known to every member of Congress as they were to the President of the United States; and yet the session was closed soon after the repeal of the embargo and non-importation acts without a single legislative enactment having in view the protection of the seat of government, unless a trifling augmentation of the marine corps, and the authority given to the President to appoint officers for the flotilla service may be construed as an exception.

Now let us observe the regular progress of events. On the 31st of March, 1814, the allied armies entered Paris in triumph, and on the 6th of April, the very day on which the chairman of the Committee of Foreign Relations reported his bill for the repeal of the embargo and non-importation acts, which had been so recently enacted by the Congress of the United States, Napoleon abdicated the imperial throne which he had himself created, and around which he had strewed so many dazzling glories. It rarely happens that "coming events"—such, at least, as this—do not "cast their shadows before them." We have said that ev-

ery arrival from Europe, for a month or more before the adjournment of Congress, brought with it rumors which affected the whole country, the government alone excepted, with apprehensions that the end of the war on the other side of the Atlantic would be but the aggravation of it on this. Napoleon had made it the fashion in Europe to dash on through all obstacles to the capital of the enemy, and the presumption was not unnatural that the British general here would endeavor to imitate that fashion, particularly if re-enforced by a few of the conquerors who had thus entered Paris.

The President and his two veteran secretaries, of Revolutionary memory, however, still saw all this with calmness. They would not believe it possible that what had happened to so many other nations could happen to theirs. Lieutenant-colonel Cliach, with 500 recruits from North Carolina for the regular army, arrived in the City of Washington soon after the adjournment of Congress, and remained encamped here for the purposes of drill and exercise for six weeks. They were still here on the 7th of June, when the President held a cabinet council, at which the Secretary of War reported that the whole force of the Fifth Military District, of which the District of Columbia then formed a part, consisted of 2154 enlisted men, scattered over the District, and one company of marines at the barracks in the City of Washington. At Fort Warburton, in Maryland — now called Fort Washington — there was one small company of artillerymen. And these two last-mentioned companies constituted the whole "state of preparation" which a committee of Congress, sanctioned by the whole body, deemed it un-

necessary to make "more complete" for the protection of the seat of government.

On the 9th of June, a French sloop of war, having on board a bearer of dispatches from the restored Bourbon dynasty to the French minister at Washington, arrived at New York. Though traveling at that day was not quite so rapid as at present, the distance from New York to Washington was not so great but that it was accomplished by the mail-stages in four or five days at the most, so that the messenger, with his dispatches, must have reached the seat of government on the 13th or 14th of the same month. As the news he brought was not designed to be secret, not many hours elapsed after his arrival before it was known to the citizens of Washington. But it could hardly be called *news*, for the brig Ida, from Rochelle, which had arrived at Boston on the 12th of May, brought information that the allied armies had entered Paris on the 30th of March, and that proclamations had been every where issued in the name of Louis XVIII.; and on the 15th of May, the cartel Fair American had arrived at Sandy Hook from Liverpool, the passengers on board of which had read in the London papers the official account to the same purport. Both these arrivals, and the intelligence they brought, were announced in the papers of the District on the 18th of May. But, unfortunately, in addition to the news from France, letters from England held out the prospect that peace would certainly be concluded between the United States and Great Britain *in the course of the summer.*

Perhaps if this had not been so confidently expected,

the other news might have fallen with a more wholesome effect upon the ears of our President and his advisers.

On the 18th of May, then, it was known in Washington that the Emperor of Russia and the King of Prussia had entered Paris on the 30th of March with 180,000 men; that Wellington, with his English and Portuguese army, was on his way thither, having triumphed over every obstacle in his march; that Napoleon was at Fontainebleau, without an army, and completely at the mercy of the allied sovereigns. On the 13th or 14th of June *official dispatches* came to the French minister, whose duty it was—a duty which he, no doubt, for his own sake, lost no time in performing—immediately to communicate to the President that he was no longer the representative of imperial France, but of his most Christian majesty Louis XVIII.; and yet, notwithstanding, and in the teeth of all this, it is asserted by General Armstrong and others that our government did not receive *official information* of the general pacification in Europe until the 26th of June. This is little more than an unworthy play upon words. The information given by the French minister here was, if not in every respect official, as well founded and credible as that received from our minister then in Paris.

The information, however, which our minister communicated to the government was not confined to the simple fact that a general peace had been restored to Europe. It stated the actual embarkation of British troops for the United States, thus merely confirming what every body but those in power had long antici-

pated. This was the *official* information which they had theretofore stubbornly refused to believe, or to acknowledge that they believed, that was not received until the 26th of June.

But it can hardly be considered an excuse for the dilatory and seemingly reluctant movements of the administration, in a conjuncture which, to the eyes of the whole country, teemed with causes of serious apprehension for the safety of the seat of government, that they waited for *official* notice that re-enforcements to our enemy here were on the way. There was not the slightest reason to doubt the truth of the news long before received, and confirmed by every arrival from Europe, that the war on the Continent was ended. The naked fact that proclamations had been issued, under the sanction of the allies, in the name of Louis XVIII., was enough to show that the "long agony" in Europe was over, that the Bourbons had been or were about to be replaced on the throne of their ancestors, and that, as a necessary consequence, England would have men to spare for her Cisatlantic contest. Preparations for the defence of our capital, even if its invasion never took place, could do no harm, except that of augmenting to a trifling degree the amount of the war debt already incurred; and, surely, it was worth some sacrifice of treasure to allay the disquietudes of the people, admitting their fears to have been "idle dreams," as they were called, and to place the safety of the seat of government beyond all hazard.

Though it may be admitted that our government did not receive *official* information until the 26th of June that some of Wellington's veteran regiments,

commanded by experienced and enterprising officers, had been actually embarked on board of transports for the United States, and that their destination for the Chesapeake Bay was no secret, we shall be able to show from historical records of the time that the President, at least, if none of his cabinet, had long before that expressed his belief that the City of Washington would be one of the objects of the enemy's attack.

In the "Report" by Colonel Richard M. Johnson, chairman of the committee appointed, on his motion, to inquire into the *causes* of the capture of Washington, &c., we find summaries of the "proceedings of the cabinet" at several meetings. That of the 7th of June, he says, "*had no particular relation to the defence of any part of Military District No. 5*," of which the District of Columbia then constituted a part. "But *soon after*," he goes on to say, "certain intelligence being received of the success of the allies in the subjugation of France [we have shown that this intelligence was received and appeared in many of the journals of the United States long *before* the 7th of June, to wit, on the 18th of May], the President believed that the enemy had the inclination and the power to increase his military and naval forces against the United States, and, in that event, *he believed that a variety of considerations would present this city as one of the prominent objects of attack.* On the 26th of June, dispatches were received from Mr. Gallatin and Mr. Bayard *confirming the views of the President*, which led him to convene the heads of departments on the 1st of July, when *he presented a plan of a force* immediately to be called into the field, and

an additional force to be kept in readiness to march *without delay, in case of necessity.* "*It seemed* to be his object that some position should be taken on the Eastern Branch and Patuxent, with two or three thousand men, and that an additional force of ten or twelve thousand militia and volunteers should be *held in readiness in the neighboring states*, including the militia of the District of Columbia, and that convenient dépôts of arms and military equipments should be established. The measures suggested were approved by the heads of the departments, *or, in other words, it does not appear that any dissent was expressed.*"*

Mr. Monroe, the Secretary of State, in his letter to the chairmain of the committee, merely says, "The events in France having greatly augmented the disposable force of the enemy, and his disposition to employ it against the United States being made known, the safety of this metropolis was thought to require particular attention."†

It will be observed that Mr. Monroe does not refer to any *date* when "the events in France" became known to himself or the President, or when "the safety of this metropolis *was thought* to require particular attention;" but, from what immediately follows in his letter, we may suppose that he knew nothing of the effect produced upon the President by those events, or if he did, chose to say nothing of it until "on or about the first of July," when the heads of departments were convened to hear his "plan." This is

* American State Papers, chap. v., Military Affairs, vol. i., p. 524. The words in *italics* are so marked by the editor of this volume.

† Ibid., p. 546.

somewhat remarkable when we reflect upon the close intimacy and mutual respect existing between these great men.

Mr. William Jones, Secretary of the Navy, in his first letter to the chairman of the committee, is equally silent as to dates. The following is his language:

"The serious apprehension of invasion and devastation which succeeded the knowledge of those extraordinary events which liberated the powerful naval and military forces of the enemy from European hostilities, and the temper of the British nation, as displayed in the language of its journals and the conduct of its government in relation to the pacific mission which it had invited, were deeply felt and frequently discussed in occasional conversations prior to the cabinet meeting on the first of July last, in which the probable points of attack were variously considered. My own impressions inclined to the opinion that there were some points more exposed, less difficult of access, and more inviting to the enemy, upon the system of warfare he had adopted, than the metropolis; the only important objects which it presented, according to my view, being the naval dépôt and public shipping.

"I recollect, on one of the occasions, that the President expressed very great solicitude for the safety of the metropolis, his belief that the enemy would attempt its invasion, and urged the expediency of immediate defensive preparations, but must confess I was not equally impressed with the apprehension of immediate danger, as well from the reasons I have before assigned, as from the then existing fact that the force of the enemy in the waters of the Chesapeake was entirely na-

val, and apparently very satisfactorily engaged in conflagrating farm-houses, and depredating upon slaves and tobacco, on the shores of the Patuxent. In this sentiment I was not alone."*

Without stopping to criticise the language of this letter, we may be permitted to remark, that the *various conversations* and *frequent discussions* said to have taken place between the President and individual members of his cabinet could hardly all have occurred between the 21st of June and the meeting of the 1st of July. Some of them, we have a right to conclude, took place *before* the arrival of the official dispatches; and we are strengthened in this conclusion by the second letter of Mr. Jones to the chairman of the committee. Before we give the extract to which we desire to call the attention of the reader, it will be proper to say that there is an obvious error in the date of the letter, as given in the volume from which it is copied. The first, from which the extract already given is quoted, is dated "Oct. 31st," and purports to be in reply to Colonel Johnson's "letter of the 24th *instant*." That from which the following extract is quoted is dated "October 3," and purports to be in reply to the same gentleman's "letter of the 26th *instant*." It is probable they were both written on the same day—31st of October—the figure 1, in the latter, being accidentally omitted. It will be remembered that our object in quoting these letters from members of the cabinet is to show that the President was fully aware of the danger that threatened the seat of government, or at least professed to be so, long before the heads of

* State Papers, *ut antea*, p. 540.

departments were called together to decide upon the expediency and sufficiency of the plan which he had devised, or *seemed* to have devised, for its defence. This is Mr. Jones's statement:

"In obedience to the general instructions and *early solicitude* of the President, in anticipation of the probable designs of the enemy to harass the country in this vicinity, and to attempt *the invasion of this metropolis*, I directed, *in the month of May last*, three twelve-pounders to be mounted on field-carriages by the mechanics of the navy-yard, and completely equipped and furnished for field service. To these the marines at headquarters were trained, under the command of Captain Miller, and prepared to act either artillerist or infantry, as the service might require."*

Nothing could be more explicit than this. Though Colonel Monroe, who bore so conspicuous a part in all the discussions and volunteer expeditions of the period, *seemed* to have known nothing of the President's solicitude for the safety of the metropolis earlier than "on or about the first of July," Mr. Jones was not only made aware of it, but received general instructions *in the month of May.*

We shall see, by-and-by, how this statement agrees with the after conduct of the President. The chairman of the committee of investigation, as we have seen, reported that the cabinet meeting of the 7th of June—*after* the President's expression of solicitude for the safety of the city, be it remembered—had no relation to the defence of *any part* of the military district in which it was situated. This is confirmed by Mr.

* State Papers, *ut antea*, p. 575.

Rush, the attorney-general, who, in his *second* letter to the chairman of the committee, in relation to the convocation of the heads of departments of the 7th of June, says, "The meeting was called and the estimate of force submitted *for purposes quite distinct from the defence* of District No. 5."* But in his first letter he says

"That, *in the month of June* of the past summer, when the momentous changes in Europe had become revealed to us, I had the honor of holding, individually, occasional interviews with the President. In dwelling upon our public affairs, he expressed his strong belief of the inauspicious results which these changes held out of every likelihood of superducing upon them; that the entire liberation of British military power from European conflicts created a corresponding probability that portions of it, unexpectedly formidable, would be thrown upon our shores. In one, at least, of the conversations, he also dwelt upon the probability of an attack upon Washington, expressing his opinion on the grounds, among others, of its own weakness, and the *éclat* that would attend a successful inroad upon the capital beyond the intrinsic magnitude of the achievement. He spoke of the immediate necessity of preparing for its defence. His impressions of the danger appeared to acquire new force from the 26th of the month, upon which day dispatches were received from two of our ministers abroad, dated early in May."†

If any of these occasional interviews which Mr. Rush had with the President had occurred *previous*

* State Papers, *ut antea*, p. 542. † Ibid., p. 541.

to the 7th of June, it would surpass belief that he failed to impart his apprehensions and solicitude for the safety of the capital to the assembled heads of departments on that day. We are constrained to believe, then, that they must all have been held between the 7th and the 26th of that month, since, according to Mr. Rush, the President's impressions of the danger only appeared to acquire *new force*, and not to have been created by the dispatches received on the day last mentioned. It is singular, indeed, that Mr. Jones should have been the only member of his cabinet to whom the President communicated his *very great solicitude* for the safety of the metropolis so early as the *month of May*. It certainly was not because he met with a more sympathizing listener in Mr. Jones than in either of the other heads of departments, for the Secretary of the Navy takes good care to repeat more than once that he did not participate in the President's apprehensions of an attack on Washington, though he promptly obeyed his instructions in preparing for its defence, so far as *three twelve-pounders mounted on field-carriages*, with Captain Miller to train his marines to their exercise, could contribute to that object.

Having given all that has been said by three members of the cabinet on the particular points of the President's expectation of an attack on Washington, his acknowledgment of the insufficiency, the "weakness" of its defences, and of his silence on the subject at the meeting of the heads of departments on the 7th of June, a month after his conversation with and instructions to the Secretary of the Navy, let us now see what his Secretary of War says of that meeting. Gen-

eral Armstrong, in his letter to the chairman of the committee, thus speaks of it:

"Early in the month of June last, a call was made on the War Department for a general report of the numbers of regular troops and militia employed by the United States, and the distribution which had been made of them for the service of the present campaign. This statement was promptly rendered, and submitted by the President to the heads of departments. It is not recollected that any alteration of the provisions exhibited by this document was either made or suggested. A reference to it will show what was the force then deemed competent for the defence of Military District No. 5, of which the City of Washington was a part."*

In a note to this passage, General Armstrong says, "This document is in the possession of the President. No copy of it was retained by me." But a copy of it, we take it for granted, is the paper marked No. 1, to be found among the documents that were submitted by the committee along with this report. It is called "A Report of the Army, its strength and distribution, previous to the 1st of July, 1814."† By this report it appears that there were in the whole "*district No. 5*" 2154 "effectives," of which 1083 were at Norfolk, 532 at Baltimore, 40 at Annapolis, 79 at Fort Washington, and 320, comprising the 36th regiment of infantry, in St. Mary's. In the District of Columbia *not one*, and yet this force was *deemed competent for the defence of Military District No. 5, of which the City of Washington was a part*—so deemed by all

* State Papers, *ut antea*, p. 538. † Ibid., p. 535.

the heads of departments; for *it was not recollected*, says General Armstrong, that *any alteration of the provisions of this document was either made or suggested.* Colonel Johnson and Mr. Rush both tell us, indeed, that this meeting of the 7th of June had no particular relation to the defence of any part of Military District No. 5; but it exhibited the distribution of the troops in the district, and showed clearly enough that the distribution was not such as to promise any effective defence of the City of Washington, if it should be attacked, *as the President believed it would be.* And *one* of the gentlemen present, at least, knew that the President so believed, or perhaps we ought rather to say, must have recollected that the President had so told him in the month of May. It was known to all that nothing had occurred in the mean time to weaken any of the grounds upon which the President had rested that belief, but, on the contrary, much to confirm and strengthen it.

CHAPTER III.

The Administration begins to awake.—Cabinet Meeting of the 1st of July.—Projects of Defence.—Creation of a new Military District.

ROUSED at length to a sense of the necessity of showing a deep solicitude for the safety of the metropolis by some more public demonstration than his frequent interviews with the members of his cabinet individually, on the 30th of June the President invited them to meet him at his mansion on the following day, the first of July, for consultation. The result of that consultation we shall present in the words, respectively, of the several members, of whom inquiries were made by the chairman of the committee of investigation. We have already placed before the reader the brief summary of the proceedings of the cabinet on that day, as given in the report of the committee, and the next in order is the statement made by the Secretary of State. In his letter, marked "No. 2" in the list of documents presented to the House of Representatives, we find the following:

"On or about the first of July last, the President convened the heads of departments and the attorney-general to consult them on the measures which it would be proper to adopt for the safety of this city and district. He appeared to have digested a plan of the force to be called immediately into the field; the additional force to be kept under orders to march at a

moment's notice; its composition, and necessary equipment. It seemed to be his object that some position should be taken between the Eastern Branch and the Patuxent with two or three thousand men, and that an additional force of ten or twelve thousand, including the militia of the District, should be in readiness in the neighboring states to march when called on; the whole force to be put under the command of an officer of the regular army.

"The measures suggested by the President were approved by all the members of the administration. The Secretaries of War and Navy gave the information required of them incident to their respective departments. The former stated the regular force which he could draw together at an early day, infantry and cavalry; the amount of the militia of the District, and the states from which he should draw the remaining force in contemplation, and in what proportions. The latter stated the aid which he could afford from the officers and seamen of the flotilla on the Patuxent and the marines at the navy-yard on the Eastern Branch. The result of the meeting promised prompt and efficacious measures for carrying these objects into execution. The command of this whole force, with that of the District No. 5, was given to Brigadier-general Winder."

If the reader will compare this statement with the summary to which we have just referred, to be found in the preceding chapter, he will see that the same singular mode of expression is used in both when speaking of the President's plan: "*He appeared to have digested a plan*," &c. "*It seemed to be his object*," &c.

There are not wanting those who have attributed this plan of a force to Mr. Monroe himself. Every body knows that Mr. Madison made no pretensions to military science, and it certainly is not improbable that, at a time when the whole country was looking with absorbing interest to the movements of the government, and when skill and experience in modes of warfare were more than ever required, he would consult some military friend before he would hazard his reputation by submitting to the animadversions of the heads of departments his own crude notions on a subject which nobody expected him to understand. He had no friend on whose fidelity he could more confidingly rely, no friend to whom he would more readily expose his ignorance, or who would be more willing to aid him at a time of need, than his Secretary of State. The surmise, therefore, was not unreasonable that Mr. Monroe himself was the planner of the scheme which *promised* to be so *efficacious* if promptly carried into execution.

The statement of General Armstrong, marked No. 3, follows that of Mr. Monroe. As our present object is confined to the exposition of what took place at the meeting of the cabinet on the 1st of July, we shall give only that portion of General Armstrong's letter which relates to the discussions then held. He says:

"On the 1st of July a consultation of the heads of departments was had. The questions proposed for discussion were two:

"1st. By what means can the seat of government and Baltimore be defended, in case the enemy should make these cities objects of attack?

"2d. Should he select the former, will his approach be made by way of the Potomac or by that of the Patuxent?

"On these questions I took the liberty of offering the following statements and opinions:

"1st. That the principal defence to be relied upon for either place was militia; that, besides the artillerists comprising the garrisons of Fort M'Henry and Washington, about one thousand regular troops only could be collected, viz., the thirty-sixth regiment, one battalion of the thirty-eighth, two troops of dragoons, two companies of the tenth—ordered from North Carolina, and believed to be on their march—one company of the twelfth, and two companies of sea fencibles; that the number of militia called into service should be proportioned to the known or probable strength of the enemy, and be taken from the states of Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania; that it is not believed the enemy will hazard a blow at either place with a force less than five thousand men; that, to repel one of this extent, we should at least require double that number of militia; that these should be assembled at some intermediate point between Baltimore and the District of Columbia, leaving the sedentary or undrafted militia of both places an auxiliary force at the disposition of the commanding general, and that arms and ammunition were in dépôt and ready for this supply."

[Under this head the Secretary of the Navy stated that the removal or destruction of the flotilla would put at his disposition between six and eight hundred seamen, and that the marines then in barracks exceeded one hundred.]

"2d. That the navigation of the Potomac is long and sinuous, and if not doubtful, as to practicability, by large ships, is at least uncertain in relation to the time its ascent may occupy; while that of the Patuxent is short and safe, and may be calculated with sufficient precision for military purposes; that, should the enemy ascend the former, his object is unmasked—he at once declares his destination, and of course leaves us at liberty to concentrate our whole force against him; that, on the other hand, should he ascend the Patuxent (or South River), his object is uncertain—it may be the flotilla, or Baltimore, or Washington; and that, as long as his point of attack is unknown, so long must our force remain divided; that these considerations suggest the preference he will probably give the Patuxent, but that this route is not without objections; that a separation from his fleet, and a land march of twenty miles through a country covered with woods, and offering at every step strong positions for defence, becomes inevitable; that, if these circumstances be turned to proper account against him, if he be not absolutely stopped, his march will be much retarded; that this state of things, on which every wise general will calculate, renders necessary a provision train, or the establishment of small intermediate posts, to keep open his communication with his shipping; that the loss of these would make his situation perilous; and that, should the main battle be given near Washington, and be to him disastrous or even doubtful, his destruction is complete; that, after all, believing he will not hazard the movement but with a

very superior force, or one he thinks such, it is also believed that he will prefer this route.

"Conformably to these opinions, an order was taken to assemble a corps and form a camp at such point between the City of Washington and Baltimore as might be selected by the commanding general."*

This comprises all that is said in General Armstrong's letter to the chairman of the committee as to the consultation of the 1st of July. It will be observed that the President's plan of a force is not even mentioned. Mr. Monroe, in his letter, is entirely silent as to these detailed views of the Secretary of War. He gives him no credit for having so well foreshadowed what the enemy would do, and described the method by which his march might be, if "not absolutely stopped," at least "much retarded." He merely says, with regard to the part taken by the Secretary of War at the meeting, that he stated "the regular forces which he could have drawn together at an early day—infantry and cavalry, the amount of the militia of the district, and the states from which he should draw the remaining force in contemplation, and in what proportions." If General Armstrong had obtruded these opinions upon the cabinet unasked, they might possibly have been misinterpreted as an objection to the measures "suggested" by the President; but he tells us they were called out by "*questions proposed for discussion.*" This is another piece of information which could not be gathered from any thing said in the letter of Mr. Monroe. From what he communicates, we are led to suppose that the President called

* State Papers, *ut antea*, p. 538.

his heads of departments together merely to consult upon the plan which HE *appeared* to have digested; while from the letter of General Armstrong we are forced to believe that they were called together for the sole purpose of discussing two given questions, neither of which had any allusion to a plan *already digested.*

But, though General Armstrong says nothing in his letter to the chairman of the committee on the subject of the President's plan, he does, in another place, state the result of the consultation held on the 1st of July.

"Officially informed on the 26th of June of the pacification in Europe, and aware of the great disposable force this event would give to Great Britain in prosecuting her contest with the United States, the heads of departments and the attorney-general were convened on the 1st of July for purposes of consultation, when it was decided,

"1st. That ten or twelve thousand drafts from the militia of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia should be held in reserve in their respective states, ready to march at a moment's notice.

"2d. That not less than two nor more than three thousand of the aforementioned drafts should be assembled for immediate service at some central point between the Potomac and Baltimore; and,

"3d. That the militia of the District of Columbia, forming two brigades, the 36th United States regiment of infantry, one battalion of the 38th, two companies of the 10th, one company of the 12th, two troops of regular dragoons, two companies of fencibles, and one hundred marines, making an aggregate of

three thousand combatants, should constitute a corps at all times disposable, under the direction of the commanding general."*

The reader of these two extracts from General Armstrong's letter to the chairman of the committee, and from his Notices of the War, published twenty-six years afterward, would never imagine that the President had "digested" a plan for the defence of the seat of government, and had called the heads of departments together for the purpose of submitting it to their consideration and approval. On the contrary, with no other statement before him of the proceedings at that meeting, he would naturally come to the conclusion that the Secretary of War had himself devised it on the spur of the moment, and that his colleagues had been so well satisfied of its efficiency by the able arguments with which he supported it, that they "decided" at once to adopt it, without discussion.

Before we proceed to the statements of Mr. Jones, the Secretary of the Navy, on the subject of this memorable cabinet meeting, we would ask the reader's attention to the very great difference in the amount of the forces said to be placed immediately under the orders of the commanding general, in the respective accounts of Mr. Monroe and General Armstrong. The former, after enumerating the forces embraced in the President's plan, says, "*The whole force* to be put under the command of an officer of the regular army." And again, "The command of *this whole force, with*

* Notices of the War of 1812, by John Armstrong, late Major-general n the Army of the United States, and Secretary of War, vol. ii., p. 127, 128.

that of District No. 5 [No. 10], was given to Brigadier-general Winder." It is important to bear in mind that Mr. Monroe is speaking of what took place *at the meeting* of the heads of departments "on or about the first of July." General Armstrong says, in his letter to the committee, in the first place, that his opinion was that "the sedentary or undrafted militia of" Baltimore and the District of Columbia should be left "at the disposition of the commanding general;" and, in the second place, in his Notices of the War of 1812, as just quoted, he says, after enumerating the troops intended to "*constitute a corps at all times disposable, under the direction of the commanding general,*" that they formed "an aggregate of *three thousand* combatants;" and we shall see hereafter that even this small portion of the force thought necessary was not for some time "disposable" by the commanding general.

The next account of the cabinet meeting is that of the Secretary of the Navy. In his letter, marked "No. 4" in the documents already described, he says,

"On the 30th day of June, the members of the cabinet were invited to attend a meeting at the President's mansion on the following day at noon.

"At or near the time appointed, the Secretaries of State, Treasury, War, and Navy, and the Attorney-general, assembled.

"The President stated the object of the meeting to be the consideration of the menacing aspect of things, in consequence of the augmented power of the enemy by the great political changes which had taken place in Europe, and the disposition manifested by the gov-

ernment and people of Great Britain to prosecute the war with the most vindictive and devastating spirit; represented the motives and inducements which he conceived the enemy had to prefer the invasion of the capital rather than any other immediate enterprise; and urged the necessity of speedy and efficient preparation for the defence of the District and capital; inquired into the existing state of its military and naval defences, and the extent of the disposable force which it would be practicable to concentrate in the District.

"The Secretary of War estimated the disposable regular force applicable to the intended purpose, to the best of my recollection, at about twelve hundred, including about two hundred cavalry at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, who, I think he said, were not all mounted, but would probably be so in a short time. He brought into view the volunteer corps of the city and District, the particulars of which I do not recollect, and estimated the dépôt at Harper's Ferry, I think, to contain, at that time, about thirty-six thousand stand of arms.

"The Secretary of the Navy enumerated the naval force within immediate reach as follows: The marines at headquarters about 120
The force attached to the flotilla under the command of Commodore Barney, on the Patuxent 500
620

"To the regular force, the President proposed to add ten thousand militia, to be designated and held in readiness in such neighboring districts as should be found most convenient. He also suggested the propriety of depositing at a suitable place, contiguous to

the metropolis, a supply of arms, ammunition, and camp equipage.

"These propositions produced very little discussion. The propriety and expediency of the measures appeared to be admitted, though no formal question was taken, nor was any dissent expressed.

"The meeting separated with the understanding, on my part, that the measures proposed were to be carried into effect, but what order took place thereon, other than in the Department of the Navy, I know not."*

Mr. Rush, in his narrative, marked No. 5, says:

"On the 30th of June, the heads of departments were desired to meet at the President's house on the following day at 12 o'clock.

"They accordingly assembled. All were present. I also, in pursuance of the President's request, attended. Our public affairs were brought into discussion: their altered and more menacing character; the probable reluctance of the Northern powers of Europe to regard favorably, at such a moment of European homage to the British name, the just rights for which we were contending; the fierce aspect which British military power now had the means, and probably would not want the disposition to put on toward us; the parts of our country most vulnerable to immediate irruption, as well as the general trials before us, were brought into view. The President mentioned what I had heard him individually express before relative to Washington, stating his impressions unequivocally to be, that if it fell within the plans of the enemy to send

* State Papers, *ut antea*, p. 540.

troops for operation upon the Atlantic frontiers this season, he thought the capital would be marked as the most inviting object of a speedy attack; that it would be right forthwith to put in train measures of precaution and defence. He then declared that to him it appeared that a force of ten thousand men should be got in readiness for the city and District; that it would be desirable to have as large a portion of it as practicable regular troops, but that, at the least, there should be a thousand of this description, and more if more could be obtained. That the residue should be made up of the volunteers and militia of the District of Columbia, combined with that from the parts nearest adjacent of Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. That convenient dépôts of arms and military equipage should also be established. No dissent was expressed to these opinions of the President. The Secretary of War made some verbal estimate of the regiments or parts of regiments near at hand. By this it appeared that, either with or independent of the marines at the navy-yard (for of this I am not certain), the portion of regular force mentioned could readily be had. I recollect nothing farther to have passed at the meeting about the defence of Washington. What measures were subsequently taken, how far those proposed were carried into effect, or by what causes they have been retarded or frustrated, I have not had the means of knowing with any certainty, and therefore can not speak. In regard to what I have said, I am disposed to entertain the less distrust of its general accuracy from the habit of keeping occasional memorandums connected with our public history, and from

having refreshed my memory by a reference to some in the present instance made at the time."*

We have now seen the respective narratives of what took place at the meeting of the heads of departments and Attorney-general on the 1st of July, of all who were present at it, with the exception of the Secretary of the Treasury, who, in his communication to the committee, says:

"The state of my health was very imperfect, and some official duty, according to my present recollection, requiring to be attended to at a certain hour, occasioned me to withdraw before the subject of the defence of the seat of government was formally taken up for discussion."

The reader will have observed that General Armstrong makes a statement differing in many respects from those of the other gentlemen. From his letter to the chairman of the committee, it is impossible to avoid the inference that his "opinions," as there set forth, constituted the groundwork of the "plan" upon which the cabinet "decided" without a dissenting voice; and from the statement given of the same meeting in his "Notices of the War of 1812," which, with some unimportant exceptions, is but a different form of expressing the same "opinions," no reader could imagine that the President bore any—much less the principal—part in the discussions of the day. It is true he introduced his historical narrative of "the means of defence" by saying they were "prescribed by the President for the safety of the city and District." But every body knows that this is an *official* style of

* State Papers, *ut antea*, p. 541.

speaking common to the members of all cabinets, and borrowed from the legal fiction *qui facit per alium facit per se.* If the President had, literally *prescribed* the means of defence, why convene the cabinet "for purposes of *consultation?*" and why say "*it was* decided" instead of *he* decided? But in the letter we are not left to mere inference that the plan adopted was his own, and not the President's, for he says expressly, "*Conformably to these opinions,* an order was taken to assemble a corps and form a camp," etc. How else can we understand him than as meaning to convey the idea that the President approved his opinions and ordered them to be carried into effect? But we shall see by-and-by that neither his "opinions," as expressed in his letter to the committee, nor the *decision* to which he says the cabinet came, were followed, in the sense in which a military man would comprehend them, either in his actual orders or in his subsequent correspondence with the commanding general.

In the first extract from the statements of the cabinet ministers given in the preceding pages, particularly in those from the letters of Mr. Jones and Mr. Rush, the reader may have been struck with the expressions ascribed to the President when speaking of the probable attack of the enemy upon the seat of government. Mr. Jones says "he expressed very great solicitude for the safety of the metropolis," and that he "urged the expediency of immediate defensive preparations." Mr. Rush says that, among the grounds which induced the President to believe in the probability of an attack on Washington was "its own weakness," and that "he spoke of the immediate ne-

cessity of preparing for its defence." The conversations in which these expressions were used occurred twelve months after a committee of the House of Representatives had reported upon the resolutions of General Philip Stuart, that they had *examined* the state of preparations for defence, naval and military, and that *no measures were necessary to render it more complete.* If the state of preparation was so *complete* in July, 1813, that it was unnecessary to make it more so, is it not somewhat extraordinary that the President should feel such *great solicitude*, and be so urgent for the adoption of *measures of defence* in May and June, 1814, particularly after the important addition of "three twelve-pounders, mounted on field-carriages," had been made to the *complete* state of preparation at the former period? We might suppose that the President knew the report of the committee to be incorrect; but this is rendered improbable by the fact that he did not, either before the close of that or the beginning of the next session of Congress, give them information, as, in that case, it would have been his duty to do, of the real state of preparation for the defence of the capital. If he believed the report of the committee to be true, then his expressions of solicitude for the safety of the capital were idle and ridiculous, for he knew that its defences had been *strengthened since* they had been declared to be *complete.* There is a mystery in all this which we do not pretend to understand. It is very plain that the committee were wrong, and we can not wonder at the objurgation leveled at them by veteran Wilkinson, who said:

"It is painful to reflect on the proceedings of a

committee of Congress, appointed to inquire and report on *matters of fact* to the popular branch of government, because, independent of the obligations of an oath, local, national, and personal character are all interested in the candor and integrity of their proceedings."* But it is not so plain who led them into their error, or whose fault it was that Congress was permitted to remain under that error until it was too late, by any thing they could do, to remedy the evil.

It may, perhaps, throw some light on the subject to mention the impressions very generally prevalent among the militia and other inhabitants of the District at the time this famous convention was held of the heads of departments "for purposes of consultation." It was generally thought and openly averred that the Secretary of War still adhered to his opinion that the enemy would never be so mad as to make an attempt upon the city, and that it was therefore totally unnecessary to make any preparations for its defence. It was also said and believed by those who were supposed to know something of the secrets of cabinet meetings, that the President and his Secretary of War at this time were not on terms of mutual good feeling and accord; that no general cordiality existed among the members themselves; that the only two military men among them were rival aspirants for popular favor; that the Secretary of State, who had been, in fact, the author of the war, was also, in fact, the source from which all the military notions of the President were derived.

In a government such as ours, it is not extraordina-

* Wilkinson's Memoirs, vol. i., note to p. 755.

ry that the people, particularly those who have daily opportunities of intercourse with the heads of departments, should soon become acquainted even with the most confidential proceedings of those in power. There is, therefore, good reason to believe that the impressions referred to had some foundation in truth. If so, it was certainly a most unfortunate state of things to exist at a time when Congress was not in session, to whom might properly have been referred the duty of providing for the defence of the city, and when effective action so much depended on the harmony and concert of the advisers of the chief magistrate.

It would be absurd to suppose that the cabinet could be ignorant of what was known to the public at large; nay, of what was from time to time announced in the National Intelligencer, the leading journal of the country, published at the seat of government, and enjoying the confidence of the administration, namely, that the British troops even then in the Chesapeake Bay amounted to from four to six thousand men. To these it would have been no more than reasonable to expect that some three or four thousand more would be added of the regiments known to have been detached from Wellington's veterans. It is not at all probable that, if the cabinet had been a "unit," it would have supposed it had done all that the case required, when, to meet these well-disciplined and experienced soldiers of the enemy, it gave its approval of the plan of calling into immediate service, and placing at the disposition of the commanding general, a corps of "three thousand *combatants*," composed, in great part, of newly-levied, undisciplined militia, who had

never seen a *combat*, and of regulars recently enlisted who had never heard the guns of the enemy. This, it will be remembered, was the *whole force* placed, or, rather, *to be* placed at the immediate disposition of the commanding general.

But the reasoning of the government was wrong. Their syllogism was this: The enemy have tried an attack on Norfolk; they failed in it; therefore they will not dare to approach Washington; and to this fatal *non sequitur* did the administration trust to the very last moment. The enemy were as well aware of the unhappy infatuation which, like the inhalation of chloric ether, had soporated our government, as the citizens of Washington themselves were; for British officers in disguise, and degenerate Americans in the pay of the British government, frequented the hotels, and passed in and out of the city unquestioned. Besides, the newspapers of the District were received almost as regularly on board the enemy's ships in the Bay as they were by daily subscribers in the city. All this was known, or certainly ought to have been known, to the members of the administration; and they ought to have known, too, that the enemy would be disposed to profit by the information thus obtained; and yet they thought that "three thousand combatants"—and such combatants—were quite enough to be called into immediate service.

Besides the "plan of force" which was decided upon at this meeting of the 1st of July, a further measure of "preparation," it seems, was adopted. This was the creation of a new military district, by dismembering the 5th, and constituting out of its dissevered

parts a 10th Military District, to be composed of the northern part of Virginia, the District of Columbia, and Maryland.

We have no reason to believe that this measure had been recommended by the Secretary of War, unless we may construe the following passage in his letter to the committee of investigation as assuming to himself the authorship of it: "The better to secure the seat of government, &c., from the attacks of the enemy, *and to relieve the War Department from details* not making part of its regular duties, and incident to District No. 5, as then constituted, a new military district, comprising that portion of country lying between the Rappahannock and Potomac rivers, the District of Columbia, and the State of Maryland, was created on the 2d of July last, and placed under the command of Brigadier-general Winder, who had been specially assigned by the President to that service."

The 5th Military District was then commanded by one of the bravest and most experienced generals in the service, Moses Porter, who had entered the Revolutionary army as a common soldier, and had gradually raised himself, by his own signal merits, through every intervening grade, from a private in the ranks to the high and distinguished post of brigadier general and commander of a military district. His headquarters were then at Norfolk, from which place a simple order from the War Department would have brought him to Washington in four or five days at the most. It could not have been apprehension for the safety of the former post that prevented this transfer, or, to speak in more military phrase, the order to change his

headquarters, for it was known that the enemy had already made an unsuccessful attack upon it before General Porter assumed the command, and while its fortifications were comparatively weak. These had now, under his orders, and with the surpassing industry and skill of one of the best engineers in the army,* been made impregnable to any force which the enemy could send against it; and this the enemy well knew; so that the temporary, or even permanent command of the place might have been safely intrusted to either of the colonels who then respectively commanded Forts Norfolk and Nelson.

The Secretary of War, it appears, was desirous of calling this veteran to the seat of government for the purpose of its defence, but his wishes were overruled. If, therefore, he either originated or approved the dismemberment of the district, it was probably from motives very different from those assigned in the extract quoted above from his letter. It is difficult to conceive how the seat of government would be less liable to an attack by circumscribing the limits of the district in which it was situated; nor is it probable that General Armstrong, indolent as he was said to be, would openly shrink from any duties which his office imposed on him, however onerous. Besides, if he could so far forget himself as to sue to be relieved from any of the responsibilities of the important station he occupied, he could not be so ignorant as to suppose that this could be effected by increasing the number of military districts, and thus multiplying the

* Captain S. Thayer, afterward promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel for these very services.

details which would necessarily require his attention. Another strong reason for believing that this measure did not owe its adoption to the advice of the Secretary of War is that he had but a short time before said, in a communication to General Izard, that "territorial limits of command are found *inconvenient.*"*

If the Secretary of War did in truth propose the dismemberment of District No. 5, and the creation of the new district No. 10, it must have been *after* his advice to call General Porter to the defence of the seat of government had been disregarded, and after he discovered that there was stronger influence than his own at work with the President in *digesting* military schemes of preparation. Another general could not be appointed to an independent command within District No. 5 without a gross insult to General Porter; and as the President had already determined to have another, and had, indeed, "specially assigned" him to the service, a commendable respect for his old fellow-soldier of the Revolution may have induced the Secretary of War to save his feelings by suggesting the establishment of a new district. It would be decidedly more civil to confine him to narrower "territorial limits" than to erect an *imperium in imperio*—to give to any officer an independent command within the legitimate sphere of his supremacy. This would naturally, and honorably for the secretary, explain the share he had, if he had any, in the creation of District No. 10.

* Wilkinson's Memoirs, p. 753.

CHAPTER IV.

Want of Harmony in the Cabinet. — Selection of a Commanding General.

In speaking of the force proposed for the defence of the District of Columbia, General Armstrong gives the following summary from the report made by the Congressional committee of inquiry:

"On the 2d of July," says the report, "the Tenth Military District was constituted, and the command given to General Winder. On the 4th a requisition on the states for 93,500 men was issued; on the 14th the governors of Pennsylvania and Virginia acknowledge the receipt of the requisition, and promised promptitude. On the 10th the Governor of Maryland was served with a copy of the requisition, and took measures to comply with it. On the 12th General Winder was authorized, in case of either *menaced* or *actual invasion*, to call into service the whole of the Maryland quota (6000 men); and on the 18th 5000 from Pennsylvania and 2000 from Virginia, making an aggregate (the regular infantry and cavalry, marines, flotilla-men, and district militia included) of *sixteen thousand six hundred* men. Such was the measure of defence designated for Military District No. 10, and such the measures taken by the War Department for assembling it up to the 18th of July, thirty-six days before the enemy's approach to the capital."*

* Notices of the War of 1812, vol. ii., p. 128–9.

The purpose for which General Armstrong gave this summary was to exonerate himself from one of the charges alleged against him, namely, that he had not used the promptitude which the occasion called for in giving effect to the measures decided upon in the cabinet. But even in this he is unfortunate; for, according to his own showing, his requisition on the states for 93,000 men was issued on the 4th, and the Governor of Maryland, from whom the largest quota for the service designated was required, was not *served with a copy* of it until the 10th of July. Here were *six days!* unnecessarily lost. Why was not a copy of the requisition sent to him on the day it was issued? and why did he delay until "the 12th" to authorize General Winder, in case of "menaced or actual invasion," to call for this whole quota (6000 men)? The cabinet must have thought that invasion was *menaced* when it was convened on the 1st of July, or it would not have decided to trouble "the states" with so startling a call upon their farmers and planters to hold themselves in readiness to march at a moment's notice. Surely the public had some right to complain of tardiness on the part of the Secretary of War when he suffered *eleven days* to elapse after the new district had been erected, "and placed under the command of Brigadier-general Winder, who had been specially assigned by the President to that service," before he gave him authority to call even for the quota of militia belonging to his own state. And the very condition of the authority shows how reluctantly it was given, even at that late date.

Whatever might have been the secretary's private

opinions, however lightly he might have treated the apprehensions of the citizens of the District, there was a solemn duty imposed on him which he alone had the legitimate right to execute, and which all his colleagues seem to have expected he would execute without a moment's delay. If he could not bring himself to believe, as others did, that the city was in imminent danger, and that immediate preparations to place it in a condition to be defended were necessary, still he knew himself to be the mere minister of the President, and bound either faithfully to execute his orders or give up his office.

But we are by no means disposed to think General Armstrong the only one to blame in these preliminary matters. The President and his cabinet—those members of it who pretended to give military counsel on the occasion—deserve no small share of the censure which the result of their consultations so richly merits. They had evidence before them that the enemy, at the time of his attempt upon Norfolk, had a force of between five and six thousand men. That attempt had failed, and it could hardly be supposed they would risk an expedition at a much greater distance from their shipping with a less, or even with no greater force. These five or six thousand men had been afterward scattered along the coast on various plundering exploits, but their rendezvous was no farther off than Halifax; and at the moment of this cabinet meeting it was known that the greater part, if not the whole of these, had again arrived in the Chesapeake. It was reasonable to suppose that this large force, already in the waters leading directly to the seat of government,

would be considerably increased by the expected regiments from Europe—regiments fresh from the rich harvest of laurels in Spain and France, and flushed, as they would naturally be, with the anticipation of adding still brighter lustre to the glories acquired in another hemisphere.

All this was for consideration before the cabinet. It was all talked of, as we are told in the interesting letter of Mr. Rush. To put the District of Columbia in a condition to be able to meet such a foe upon any thing like equal ground, something more was necessary than a mere hasty requisition upon the neighboring states for raw militia, particularly as two years of war experience ought to have taught the administration that such requisitions had rarely or never been complied with in time to meet the exigencies for which they were made. It was certainly not exclusively the fault of the Secretary of War that nothing was done in the way of preparation from the month of May, when, as we learn from the letter of Mr. Jones, the President expressed his apprehensions of an attack, and his very great solicitude for the safety of the city. It was not his fault that five days were suffered to elapse after the dispatches were received from Messrs. Gallatin and Bayard before the cabinet were consulted on the all-important *official information* contained in them. These delays, for which the executive alone is responsible, at a time, too, when neither rail-roads nor electric telegraphs offered their facilities for the transmission of orders and the transportation of troops, were, to say the least, evidences of a much more culpable indifference to the safety of the seat of government

than that ascribed to the Secretary of War in his supposed want of promptitude in furthering the execution of the plan of defence after it was decided upon in the cabinet.

Nor can we fairly impute it as a fault to the Secretary of War, circumstanced as we have every reason to believe he was at the council board—his opinions disregarded, his advice set at naught, his selection of a commanding officer overruled—that the chief reliance for the defence of the capital of the country was placed in militia drafts from a distance, to be called out at a moment's notice, without previous training, and having no inducement to prompt them to willing service other than the general motive of patriotism, which it must be supposed was common to every citizen, rather than in the whole body of male inhabitants of the District of Columbia, in whom, to the common interest of American citizens, were superadded the dearer and stronger promptings of domestic relations, the preservation of which was involved in the safety of the city. A proclamation by the President, even of so late a date as the 4th of July, calling upon every citizen of the District capable of using a musket or rifle, would have rallied around him, within less than a week after its promulgation, a body, old and young, of at least five thousand men, who, in the month intervening before the attack, might have been so instructed and disciplined in the use of arms that, animated as they would have been by the inspiring hopes of saving wives, children, and homes, they would, with the assistance of a few regular troops, have sufficed to repel the invader.

When we look at the enormous paper army con-

jured up by the scrape of a pen on the 4th of July, the thirty-eighth anniversary of that glorious day which had witnessed the pledge of "lives, fortunes, and sacred honor" to the maintenance of American independence, and reflect upon the ridiculous handful to which it dwindled at the moment of need, we find it difficult to resist a belief in fatalism. It seems hardly possible that any power less resistless than that ascribed to the mythic Fates could have ruled the deliberations of the American cabinet on this momentous occasion.

After having created Military District No. 10, and decided upon the several quotas of militia to be required from the states of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia respectively, the next subject of discussion, we may suppose, was the selection of a military commander for the new district—though it might be inferred from the language of General Armstrong that this had been predetermined by the President himself: so, at least, if we are to credit the statement of the other members of the cabinet, had been the plan of force to be called out; and if he submitted the one subject after his own mind had been made up upon it, there is no reason to doubt that he submitted the other in like manner. It was a point of even more importance than the selection of troops, whether regard be had to the quality or number of the latter. A commander of well-known and acknowledged experience and good fortune—for sometimes success is as much the result of the latter, in the eyes of the soldiers, as of skill or courage—would have brought with him to the execution of his duties what the French call a *prestige*, a

prepossession in his favor, which would have inspired the troops with a confidence perhaps sufficient to counterbalance all the deficiencies in their organization. They would have obeyed the orders of such a leader with a trustful conviction that whatever he commanded was right and necessary. They would have fought under him with the animating presentiment of victory; and all who are acquainted with human nature are aware that the stimulus of such an anticipation rarely fails to bring about its own realization.

We have some reluctance in assuming so positively what can not be rigorously proved, that there existed rivalries and jealousies in the high places of the nation at a time when harmony and friendly concert of action were of so much importance to the interests and honor of the country; but human nature is, unfortunately, not changed by rank or station, and the same petty feuds and prejudices that govern the conduct of men toward each other in the humblest walks of life are found operating with equal force in the highest. If there had been no mutual jealousies between the two Revolutionary secretaries, it is not probable that any objection would have been made to the selection by the head of the War Department of General Porter to command the force destined for the defence of the seat of government; for that the objection originated, either directly or indirectly, with the Secretary of State, was never doubted by any intelligent citizen of Washington at the period referred to; and it is as little to be doubted that the principal ground of the objection was that the Secretary of War recommended the appointment.

There was another consideration, perhaps, which operated on the mind of the secretary with an influence not less powerful than gallantry and patriotism, to induce him to take the conspicuous part he did in the agitated question of proper measures for defending the seat of government, and it was quite natural that it should have that effect. He was regarded as a prominent candidate for the presidential succession; the eyes of the whole people would be upon the defenders of Washington; a brilliant volunteer achievement, accomplished without the orders acknowledged of the commanding general, would win for him the hearts of his countrymen, and render his future elevation sure. This could not well be attempted under the bluff old soldier Moses Porter, or any other experienced general not indebted to him for his appointment.

One of the most eminent men and profound statesmen of the present age, in his admirable sketch of Lord North, says of him, that "when he found he could no longer approve the policy which he was required to pursue, and of course to defend, he was bound to quit the councils of his obstinate and unreasonable sovereign. Nor can there be a worse service, either to the prince or his people, than enabling a monarch to rule in his own person, dictating the commands of his own violence or caprice through servants who disapprove of his measures, and yet suffer themselves to be made instruments for carrying them into execution. A bad king can desire nothing more than to be served by such persons, whose opinions he will as much disregard as their inclinations, but whom he will always find his tools in doing the work of mis-

chief, because they become the more at the monarch's mercy in proportion as they have surrendered their principles and their will to his."*

These remarks contain a truth equally as applicable under our republic as under the monarchy of Great Britain. When a minister continues to hold his place after he finds that his opinions and his judgment are at variance with those of his chief on the particular concerns of his own department, he certainly gives fair ground for suspicion that he is actuated more by love of place or its emoluments than by love of country. When a man surrenders his principles and his conscience to the will of another, he disqualifies himself for being the adviser of any body, much less of a chief magistrate, and becomes at once, as Lord Brougham most truly remarks, a fit tool for any mischievous work he may be ordered to execute.

In the most important of all the subjects upon which the President saw fit to consult his heads of departments, we have seen that the advice of the Secretary of War—the most competent, not only on account of his large experience, but better acquaintance, which his position enabled him to form, with the officers of the army, to give advice—was unheeded; but he remained, nevertheless, to carry out the decision of others, and to subject himself to criminations which he might, by immediate resignation of his office, have thrown upon those who more deserved them.

None will deny, we presume, that there was no mil-

* Historical Sketches of Statesmen who flourished in the Time of George III., together with Remarks on the French Revolution. By Henry Lord Brougham, F. R. S., vol. i., p. 53.

itary command within the United States, considering all the circumstances, of higher importance, nor one involving more fearful responsibilities than that of the newly-created district. The eyes of the whole nation would naturally be in an especial manner fixed upon the individual appointed to it, since it embraced that in which every citizen of the republic felt or had an equal interest. In no other military district could the consequences of success or defeat be so widely spread or so deeply felt. It included within its narrow limits the Federal City, the governmental archives, all that belonged to the people in common as a nation. With these were closely linked the dearest sympathies of the patriot; and every man who had the interest and honor of his country at heart would watch with critical and jealous vigilance every movement, every word of the commander to whose prudence, and prowess, and skill its defence was intrusted.

Under these considerations, we repeat, there was no military district in the United States that so imperatively required a commander of acknowledged ability and tried experience—one in whom not only the people generally, but the troops of the District more especially, could repose the most undoubting trust and confidence. These considerations appear to have had but little weight with the administration. The best friends of the selected commander must have admitted that there was nothing in his antecedent career to recommend him particularly to the preference of the executive.

We can not regard, as some have professed to do, the acceptance of the appointment as removing any

portion of the burden of responsibility from the shoulders of the President. There was, probably, not one man in a million who would, or who could properly, have refused to receive so distinguished a mark of executive confidence, so high and honorable a testimonial of merit. To one in the vigor of manhood, glowing with the aspirations and impulses of an honorable and patriotic ambition, full of high-minded and noble devotion to his country's service, and anxious to blot from the memory of his fellow-citizens the misfortune which had attended his last campaign in the North, the temptation of such an opportunity was too strong to be resisted.

General Winder had but recently returned from a long imprisonment in Canada, the consequence of his capture by the enemy during a night attack on our troops under General Chandler at Stony Creek on the 3d of June, 1813.

General Dearborn, in his account of this affair to the Secretary of War, called it a "strange fatality." General Chandler, however, who was General Winder's senior, shared the same fate, and Major-general Morgan Lewis, who succeeded Dearborn in the command, in a later communication to the War Department, seems to exonerate General Winder from all censure. He says, "A view of General Chandler's encampment will be sufficient to show that his disaster was owing to its arrangement, its centre being its weakest point; and that, being discovered by the enemy in the evening, received the combined attack of his whole force, and his line was completely cut. It is said, though I can not vouch for its truth, that General Winder saw

this and remonstrated against it."* And Colonel Bain, in his official letter to the commanding general, speaks of it as "the unfortunate capture of Brigadier-generals Chandler and Winder, who were taken in the action, *unknown to any part of the army*, and hurried into the enemy's lines."

General Armstrong, in his "Notices,"† referring to the errors of the campaign of Washington, says,

"The error of first occurrence in this campaign belongs exclusively to the administration, and will be found in the selection made of a commanding general, not on the ground of distinguished professional service or knowledge, but simply on a presumption that, 'being a native of Maryland, and a relative of the governor, Brigadier-general Winder would be useful in mitigating the opposition to the war, and in giving an increased efficiency to the national measures within the limits of the state;' an opinion which, though somewhat plausible, was wholly unsustained by the event."

And he adds in a note,

"The person recommended by the Secretary of War for this appointment was Brigadier-general Moses Porter, then at Norfolk, whose whole life may be said to have been military. Entering the army of the Revolution a boy, he had, by a uniform good conduct, risen through every rank, from that of a private to the command of a brigade. No objection to General Winder, excepting a *want of military experience*, either was or could be made; his patriotism and courage had already been tested, and were generally acknowledged."

* Annals of Congress, *ut antea*, 1st and 2d Sessions of 14th Congress, col 2372.

† Vol. ii., p. 140.

General Armstrong could hardly have been ignorant of the grounds upon which General Winder's appointment was urged and determined in the cabinet; and we can not believe him capable of making a false statement in such positive, precise, and unqualified terms. Yet, in spite of the experience which we have had of the frailties of great men in more recent times, it seems almost incredible that statesmen to whom we look back with so much reverence as Madison and Monroe should have been governed, in a matter so important to the nation, by a policy so shortsighted and trivial, indicating rather craft than the broad and comprehensive wisdom for which history has heretofore given them credit. Surely the most effectual mode of "mitigating the opposition to the war" would have been to render the war successful and glorious; and that would best have been accomplished by selecting able men for the conduct of military operations, without reference to their personal relations or party opinions, by encouraging capacity, no matter from what rank or class of life it sprung, and giving it the means of displaying itself in a way which should advance the public interests. A brilliant victory would have stopped the clamor of thousands against the war; an appointment could conciliate but a few, and might create as much opposition in one quarter as it removed in another.

Mr. Ingersoll, in his Historical Sketch of the War of 1812,* states that General Winder, "being a relative of Levin Winder, the Governor of Maryland, federal governor of a federal state, Mr. Madison and

* Page 164.

Mr. Monroe deemed it politic to conciliate opposition by appointing him to that responsible and arduous command," etc. But the administration was not yet reduced to such straits as to be compelled to conciliate opposition in this manner; and Mr. Madison, being now in the second and closing term of his presidency, could have had but little motive on his own account to resort to such expedients. A more probable hypothesis, therefore, would be that, General Armstrong having a better hold of the Democratic or Republican party than Mr. Monroe, the latter was compelled to rely more on popularity with the nation at large, and had already commenced that task of "exterminating the monster party spirit," upon the accomplishment of which he was afterward so warmly congratulated by General Jackson. If this hypothesis be correct, the disgrace of General Armstrong after the battle of Bladensburg, and Mr. Monroe's elevation to the presidency by an overwhelming national vote, prove that the Secretary of State, so far as his own interests were concerned, had laid his plans very judiciously.

But such plans were not very conducive to the glory and welfare of the nation. With an administration and cabinet so constituted and occupied, one military aspirant for the presidency operating successfully on the affections of the chief magistrate, and another with partial success on his fears, the choice of a commanding general, whose proceedings were to be subject to the immediate supervision and interference of both, was a matter of little importance so far as the public was concerned. Whoever might have been selected was a doomed man, unless he combined the talents of

an able general with those of an able intriguer and courtier; for either one of these powerful rivals could have done more in an hour to perplex and baffle than the other could have done in a week to assist and facilitate his plans.

As to the propriety of General Winder's accepting the command conferred on him, circumstanced as he was, we take the liberty of adding to the remarks we have already made on this subject the explanation of one who appears to have known him intimately, and regarded him with high esteem. "The appointment was one," says the veteran we quote, "which, as he stood at the head of the general staff, he could have consistently declined; and if he had possessed more experience he would have done so, because there was not a shadow of defensive preparation, and the attack of the enemy might be daily expected; but professional ambition, zeal for the service, and a thirst for fame will always prevail over sober reflection; indeed, it is rare to find a soldier of pride and spirit, such as General Winder is allowed to be, who weighs and balances causes and effects in the scales of discretion. Such phlegm does not comport with the enterprise of the youthful chief; deliberation is the province of the veteran, who, content to do his duty, seeks not adventures; and yet I speak from sad conviction when I say the most experienced may sometimes be beguiled by fair prospects and ministerial promises."*

* Wilkinson, vol. i., p. 754.

CHAPTER V.

Difficulties in the way of the Commanding General.

LET us now take a brief retrospect of the obstacles and difficulties against which the new commander of the new military district was called upon to contend. General Wilkinson says, "General Winder accepted the command without means, and without time to create them. He found the District without magazines of provisions or forage, without transport tools or implements, without a commissariat or efficient quarter-masters' department, without a general staff, and, finally, without troops. * * * * * * The requisition [on the several states, issued on the 4th of July] was a mere matter of form, and incapable of producing the end it affected to embrace. In each state the militia was first to be organized and equipped in the manner prescribed by the requisition, and yet in those states there existed no power to organize and equip in such form, and, until special organization and equipment had taken place, the call was not to take place; but when the exigency arises, the general is to apportion his call to the occasion; and, instead of being authorized to have at all times a proportion of at least two thirds of the given number of militia trained to military duties in a camp of observation and exercise, to await the expected exigency, around which the remainder might rally, he is, when danger stares him in the face, to the utter neglect of the many important

duties pressing on him, obliged to devote his time to the collection of and formation of a body of raw yeomanry, and is himself trammeled with restrictions, and left with scarcely more discretion than the corporal of a picket guard."*

"Winder's was an arduous perplexity: to arm and fortify a military district without magazines or troops, controlled by a cabinet of older soldiers than himself, whom it would be disrespectful in him to contradict, and almost insubordinate to overrule; to lead undisciplined neighbors to battle, in whose martial prowess he could not confide, of whose blood he was humanely sparing, overlooked by several superiors, and distracted by a host of advisers."†

"The appointment of a general, unless a proper military staff is furnished him, and efficient troops given him, is a very unnecessary ceremony. There were few regular troops within the power of the government; the most numerous body which had recently been within or near the District, 500 men of the 10th infantry, under Lieutenant-colonel Clinch, a body of stout, active young men enlisted in North Carolina, which had been encamped near Washington for several weeks, were marched away to the northern frontiers on the 13th of June, in the midst of the alarm of an expected attack. In strictness, two detachments of the 36th and 38th infantry, and a small detachment of artillery, amounting in the whole to 330 men, were all that could be said to be at their disposal at the time that the 10th military district was created, nor

* Wilkinson, vol. i., p. 754–756.

† Ingersoll's Histor. Sketch of the Second War, &c., p. 164, 165.

was this great deficiency remedied in any degree before the troops were called into action. No orders were issued by the War Department appointing an assistant adjutant-general, assistant inspector-general, or assigning to duty in the District any topographical engineers; and it is well known that General Winder's greatest complaint was, that he had not the aid of this staff, without which the proper organization, equipment, and efficiency of troops is impossible, and that his time was occupied by an oppressive mass of detail, when he should have been at liberty to devote it to duties of a very different character."*

How far General Winder proved himself competent to suggest the means of improving the organization of his district—for to suggest was all that he had authority or power to do—will be seen by his first official letter to the Secretary of War. He was informed "within the few last days of June," probably immediately after his arrival in Washington with General Wilkinson on the 26th or 27th of that month,† that it was in contemplation to create another military district, and that the President intended to vest in him the command of it. He very soon afterward returned to Baltimore, and "about the 4th or 5th of July" he received a letter from the secretary requiring his presence again in Washington, and inclosing the order constituting the 10th Military District. He does not mention whether this letter also inclosed his commission; but as General Wilkinson says he did not receive it until the 6th, it

* A Sketch of the Events which preceded the Capture of Washington by the British, on the 24th of August, 1814, p. 8, 9.

† Wilkinson, vol. i., p. 741.

may have been handed to him on this visit to Washington, in obedience to the secretary's orders. It was while in the city on this occasion that he held the conversation with that functionary alluded to in a letter which he wrote immediately after his return to Baltimore. The great importance of this document requires that it should be given to our readers without abridgment; and we are disposed to believe that it can not be perused with the attention it deserves without leaving upon the mind of the reader the conviction that if the suggestions contained in it had been promptly adopted, the result of the enemy's visit to Washington would have been very different. It is as follows:

"Baltimore, July 9, 1814.

"SIR,—The objects of the command which has been conferred on me have consequently, since I received it, occupied my serious consideration.

"The utmost regular force which it is probable can, in the present state of affairs, be placed at my command, including the force necessary for garrisoning the several forts, will not exceed 1000 men, and some weeks will necessarily elapse before the detachments from Virginia and Carlisle will reach my district. The detachments of the 36th and 38th are, therefore, the only troops that I can expect to have in the mean time, and when those other detachments join, the utmost force will be from 700 to 800.

"In conversation with you at Washington, I understood the idea at present entertained relative to the auxiliary militia force proposed for the District to be, that it shall be drafted and designated, but that no

part of it is to be called into the field until the hostile force now in the Chesapeake shall be re-enforced to such an extent as to render it probable that a serious attack is contemplated.

"The enemy's fleet has now spent more than a twelvemonth in the waters of the Chesapeake, and during that time has visited almost every river falling into the Bay, and must be presumed to have such accurate information that whatever expedition may be destined to these waters will have a definite object, to the execution of which, on its arrival, it will proceed with the utmost promptitude and dispatch. Should Washington, Baltimore, or Annapolis be their object, what possible chance will there be of collecting a force, after the arrival of the enemy, to interpose between them and either of those places? They can proceed, without dropping anchor, to within three hours' rowing and marching of Baltimore, within less of Annapolis, and upon arriving off South River, can debark and be in Washington in a day and a half. This celerity of movement, on their part, is not probable, owing to adverse weather and other causes; but if the enemy has been active, while in our waters, to acquire a knowledge of our country, of which there can be no doubt, and should be favored with weather on the arrival of re-enforcements, he can be in Washington, Baltimore, or Annapolis in four days from entering the Capes. But, allowing liberally for all causes of detention, he can be in either of those places in ten days from his arrival. What time will this allow us to hear of his arrival, to disseminate through the intricate and winding channels the various orders to the

militia for them to assemble, have their officers designated, their arms, accoutrements, and ammunition delivered, the necessary supplies provided, or for the commanding officers to learn the different corps and detachments, so as to issue orders with the promptitude and certainty so necessary in active operations? If the enemy's force should be strong, which, if it come at all, it will be, sufficient numbers of militia could not be warned and run together, even as a disorderly crowd, without arms, ammunition, or organization, before the enemy would already have given his blow.

"Would it not, then, be expedient to increase the force of my command by immediately calling out a portion of the militia, so that, by previously selecting the best positions for defence, and increasing as far as possible the natural advantages of these positions, the advance of the enemy might be retarded, his force crippled, and time and opportunity thus gained for drawing together whatever other resources of defence might be competent to resist the enemy? The small force of regulars will be incompetent to accomplish any material works at favorable positions for strengthening the defences, and to supply the various vedette parties which it will be necessary to station on the prominent points of the Bay to watch the enemy, and communicate his movements with the greatest possible dispatch.

"Allow me, sir, respectfully to propose that four thousand militia be called out without delay: I propose to station these in equal proportions in the most eligible positions between South River and Washington, and in the vicinity of Baltimore. Baltimore could

not be aided by a force stationed between South River and Washington unless a force were on the spot to retard the advance of the enemy until it could arrive, and so with respect to Washington. Each could assist the other if of this magnitude, and it appears to me that, with materially less means actually in the field and ready for instant action, no hope can be entertained of opposing the enemy in assailing either of these places.

"I shall proceed to Annapolis to-morrow, and have but little doubt that the executive of Maryland will cordially co-operate in affording such means as it may be deemed advisable to call for; and I beg you will permit me to procure this, or such other militia force as the President may think proper immediately to be called out.

"I sent an order from Washington for the detachment of the 36th and 38th to move up to the head of South River, where I propose to meet them, and fix upon the most eligible spot for the camp intended to defend Washington.

"You will please, therefore, to direct any communications to me to Annapolis, which will enable me to make the requisite arrangements with the executive of Maryland at once.

"I have the honor to be, with great respect, sir, your obedient servant, W. H. WINDER,*

"Brigadier-general commanding the 10th

"Military District.

"To Hon. John Armstrong, Secretary of War."

To this important letter no reply whatever was

* State Papers, *ut antea*, p. 543.

made, or none, at least, of which any record can be found; nor was any respect paid to its suggestions.

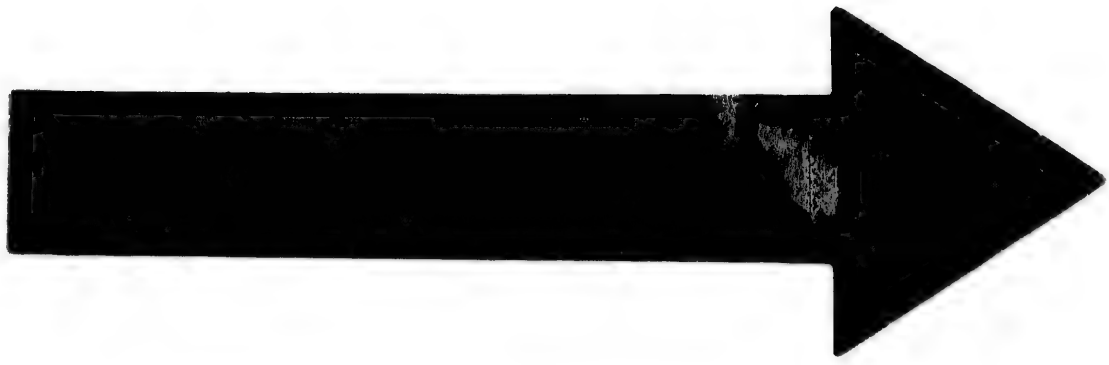
The secretary and the general, it appears, differed widely as to the necessity of training militia before they are brought into battle. General Armstrong, it can not be denied, had had longer experience and better opportunities of observing the character of militia; and it was his opinion, founded upon numerous instances in the Revolutionary war, that they always acted with more energy and spirit if called to the field of battle immediately after their arrival in camp, than when they had been previously drilled and disciplined for months. In the latter case, they have lost the pride which raises them, in their own estimation, as citizens, above the enlisted soldiers; have become home-sick, careless, indifferent, slovenly, and spiritless; while, if brought into action in the freshness of their home-feelings, in the pride of their independence as citizens, they fight as if their own individual rights were at stake in the battle, each emulating the other in the courage and manliness of his bearing.

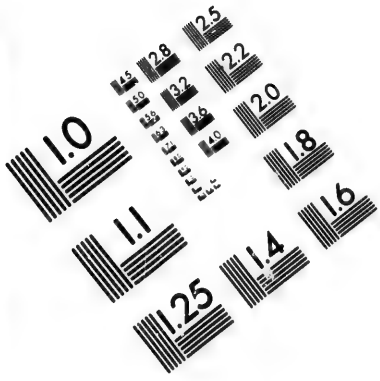
Now, whether this theory of the Secretary of War was philosophic, and founded on a more correct knowledge than others possess of human nature, or purely chimerical, it may serve to explain much of the apparent indifference imputed to him when called upon by anxious and impatient citizens, and urged to adopt their views of the matter rather than his own. For ourselves, we do not hesitate to express our preference of the views taken by the commanding general. We believe that no man can be a good soldier until he has learned something of discipline and subordination.

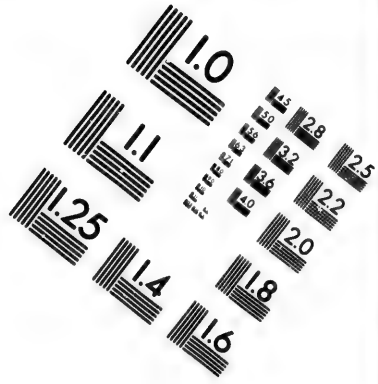
To learn these requires time; and the authority to bring all the force allowed him into the field should have been contemporaneous with the appointment of Brigadier-general Winder. But we are not disposed altogether to blame the Secretary of War that this was not done. His opinions, we have seen, had but little weight with the President and his cabinet in other matters, and we are not prepared to say they were adopted in this.

The Governor of Maryland, it can not be doubted, did all that could have been expected of him to insure prompt obedience on the part of his militia officers. The general, at least, does not seem to have thought that any blame for delay or defective exercise of power could be justly attached to his relative. In his letter to the Secretary of War of the 23d of July, dated at Upper Marlborough, he says, "The governor has issued orders for calling out three thousand of the drafts under the requisition of the 4th of July, and at my suggestion has appointed Bladensburgh as the place of rendezvous."* From Piscataway he writes on the 27th, "The governor *is exerting himself* to collect a force at Annapolis;" and in a second letter of the same date, from the same place, he says, "The governor has been *in vain* endeavoring to assemble the neighboring militia at Annapolis; he had called on Frederick County, and some militia were coming in from thence when I was last at Annapolis. *All this force is, however, called out by the authority of the state, and is not under my command;* but they do, and will, co-operate toward the general defence."

* State Papers, *ut antea*, p. 546.







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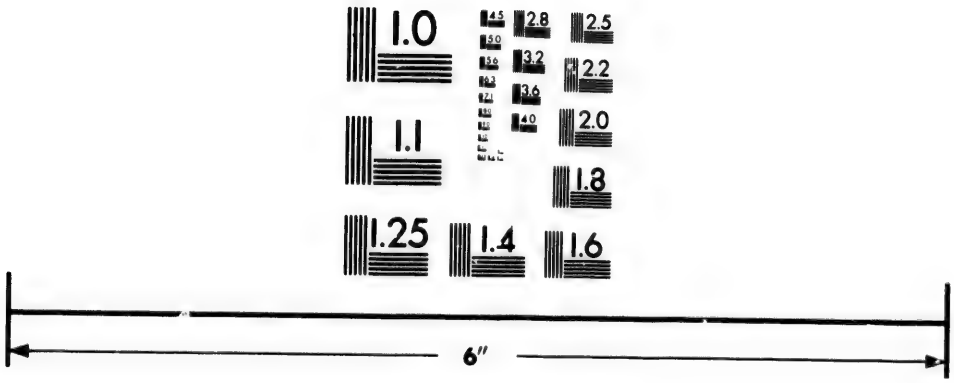

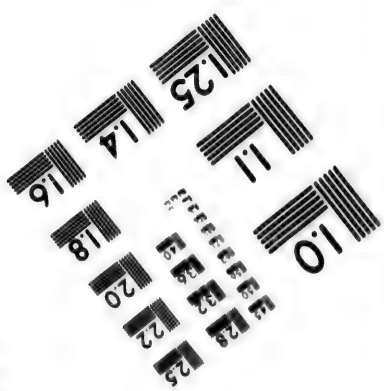

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It is manifest that if the Governor of Maryland, clothed with all the power of the state, was unable to collect a small force from the neighboring militia to protect the capital of the state itself, he would be much less able to compel obedience to his orders when calling out the militia for purposes in which they felt less immediate interest. All that he could consistently do was to order them out; if they did not choose to obey his orders, the only penalty he could inflict would be to bring officers and men to courts-martial, a process which could hardly have been accomplished in time to meet the wants of the commanding general. The fault was evidently in the militia system rather than the executive of the state.

On the 13th of August, General Winder writes thus from Baltimore: "In consequence of the two regiments which were drafted from General Smith's division, under the requisition of April last, being accepted as a part of the quota of Maryland under the requisition of the 4th of July last—of the impracticability, besides impropriety, of calling any portion of those drafted from the Eastern Shore, and the necessity of leaving all the men immediately upon the Bay and low down upon the rivers for local defence on the Western Shore, the remaining portion of the Maryland drafts to be assembled at Bladensburgh, instead of being three thousand, will not much exceed as many hundred. I shall require the governor to order out all the drafts that can possibly be spared from the three lower brigades on the Western Shore; but, since the whole number drafted on the Western Shore, exclusive of those drawn from General Smith's division,

do not amount to fifteen hundred, I apprehend that, after all *shall be assembled* under this second order from the Governor of Maryland, they will not exceed one thousand men. The most convenient and immediate resource to supply this deficiency, which occurs to me, will be to take the militia drawn out under the state authority, and now assembled at Annapolis, to the amount of one thousand men, into the service of the United States, and to call on the Governor of Pennsylvania for one regiment. This would make the militia force (independent of two regiments near this place) under my command between two and three thousand men, and would complete the views of the President in the order communicated to me by you to call for not more than three, nor less than two thousand over and above the two regiments here.

"The objects for which the militia were called to Annapolis were such as to make it proper that the force should be under the direction of the commander of the 10th Military District. Some force ought and must be kept at Annapolis; and if it should be deemed proper to authorize me to accept them, I should leave them there until some necessity occurred requiring them elsewhere, and the trouble and expense of advancing a detachment there would be avoided.

"These men are only called out for sixty days, which may, perhaps, be long enough, and will, at all events, afford sufficient time to ascertain whether a further force will be necessary. They are already in the field, equipped in all respects, and organized. A saving of their equipments will be gained by the United States, and all the time and trouble of calling a force in their place."

Here we see that, only *eleven days* before the enemy entered Washington, the commanding general had under his orders but little more than a thousand men, which force, provided the President would allow him to accept the services of the militia at Annapolis, would make his whole army, exclusive of the two Baltimore regiments, *between two and three thousand men!*

In his letter of 23d of July, from Upper Marlborough, there occurs a passage which no reflecting reader can peruse without a feeling of astonishment and indignation at the culpable neglect or indifference with which the arduous and unremitted labors of the commanding general to perfect his arrangements for the defence of his district were treated by those in power. After telling the Secretary of War that he had appointed Bladensburg as the place of rendezvous for the three thousand Maryland drafts which the governor had issued orders for calling out, he says, "It will be necessary that arms, ammunition, accoutrements, tents, and camp equipage be deposited there for them. *I have no knowledge where these articles are in store* nearest that point, nor under whose charge they are. I must pray you to give the necessary orders for having the requisite deposits made at that place."

The general had then been actively engaged in the multifarious duties of his command for some eighteen or twenty days, and had not been informed where or in whose custody his military stores were to be found! The fact is well-nigh incredible, and yet, coming from the commanding general himself, we are constrained to believe it. Surely, as we have elsewhere said, some fatality must have hung over every thing that related

to the defence of the seat of government. We have seen that when General Winder accepted his appointment, his district was destitute of every requisite to constitute a military command. Requisitions, it is true, had been simultaneously made upon the three nearest states for militia, but these were merely to be held in readiness and placed conditionally under his control. He had no staff, no stores, no troops; he was left to the necessity of being his own commissary, his own secretary, his own vedette, and to be himself his own express-rider. It is only necessary to look at the dates and places of his letters to the War Department to see that between the 9th and 27th of July, an interval of eighteen days, he was at Baltimore, Annapolis, Upper Marlborough, the Wood Yard, Nottingham, Piscataway, Warburton, Port Tobacco, and sometimes twice or thrice within that short period at the same place, besides being several times at Washington, where, of course, it was unnecessary to write letters. If we take into consideration the various distances between these places, and the state of the roads forty years ago, we shall be compelled to acknowledge that he could not have been at any one time twenty-four hours at rest.

There is, perhaps, no instance to be found in history of a commanding general so disadvantageously situated. Appointed to take command of an army of "ten or twelve thousand" men, who, he is told, are "held in readiness" to obey his orders, he enters upon his duties, and finds that he has not even a corporal's guard. In his first attempt to exercise the power vested in him to call these *ready* men into service, he

finds himself tied down by conditions which render his power a nullity. It is like setting a man down to a Barmecide's feast—a table covered with empty dishes—and, with a mockery of hospitality, inviting him to help himself.

From the moment of General Winder's appointment to the command of the 10th District to the day the enemy entered the City of Washington, there is nothing to be found in the correspondence between him and the Secretary of War from which it can be inferred that the latter did not treat him with the utmost courtesy and confidence. Nor is there any thing in the long and interesting "Narrative of General Winder," addressed to the chairman of the committee of investigation, that can lead us to believe he desired to cast the slightest censure upon the secretary for any imputed want of respect or cordiality in their intercourse with each other. But after the disastrous issue of the day, when irritated and goaded by the clamors of a disappointed and excited people, who resorted to every offensive mode of showing that they attributed to him the unsuccessful defence of the city, it can not be thought very surprising that the secretary began to think it necessary, for his own reputation, that the blame should rest upon other shoulders. His retirement from the War Department and from Washington a few days after the unfortunate 24th of August, and while the juncture of affairs, by his own acknowledgment, was still critical, would, if left without some explanation, very naturally be taken as a tacit admission of the truth of the charges which had been so openly made against him by the militia and citi-

zens of the District. General Armstrong was well aware of this; and, accordingly, on the 5th of September, three days after his departure from Washington, there appeared in the *Baltimore Patriot* a letter, addressed by him to the editors, which, as it is the only notice that he condescended to take of the many severe criminations fulminated against him, we deem it proper to spread before the reader without curtailment. Justice to the memory of one of the distinguished men of the Revolution demands this at our hands. The only liberty we have taken with it, as it appeared in the Patriot, has been to *italicize* the particular paragraph which led us to infer that the feelings of its author toward the commanding general either underwent a change after the official relation between them had ceased to exist, or had previously been well dissembled.

CHAPTER VI.

General Armstrong's Letter to the Editors of the Baltimore Patriot. —Comments upon its extraordinary Disclosures.

It does not often occur that the public are permitted to pass so familiarly behind the scenes as to see what passes among the several actors before they have prepared themselves to appear on the stage in their respective and appropriate disguises. Were such to be the case as a general rule, the audience would soon lose all power of deluding themselves into the belief that the characters before them were really what they represented, and would thus be deprived of the principal source of their amusement, and the sole chance of moral instruction from what they heard. From the nature of our government, it is true, there can be but few of what are called "state secrets," but there must be, in all governments, some individual, personal matters, which a sense of decorum would require to be kept private. The reader will probably agree with us after reading the following:

"It may be due to myself, and is certainly due to others, that the reasons under which I retired from the direction of the War Department, at a juncture so critical as the present, should be fully and promptly known to the public. These reasons will be found in the following brief exposition of facts:

"On the evening of the 29th ultimo the President called at my lodgings, and stated that a case of much

delicacy had occurred; that a high degree of excitement had been raised among the militia of the District; that he was himself an object of their suspicions and menaces; that an officer of that corps had given him notice that they would no longer obey any orders coming through me as Secretary of War; and that, in the urgency of the case, it might be prudent so far to yield to the impulse as to permit some other person to exercise my functions in relation to the defence of the District.

"To this statement and proposition I answered substantially as follows: That I was aware of the excitement to which he alluded; that I knew its source and had marked its progress; that the present was not a moment to examine its more occult causes, objects, and agents; that it ostensibly rested on charges known to himself to be false; that it was not for me to determine how far the supposed urgency of the case made it proper for him to yield to an impulse so vile and profligate, so injurious to truth, and so destructive of order; but that for myself there was no choice; that I could never surrender a part of my legitimate authority for the preservation of the rest; that I must exercise it wholly or not at all; that I came into office with objects exclusively public; and that to accommodate my principles or my conduct to the humors of a village mob, stimulated by faction and led by folly, was not the way to promote these; and that, if his decision was taken in conformity to the suggestion he had made, I entreated him to accept my resignation. This he declined doing. It was an extent, he was pleased to say, to which he meant not to go; that he

knew the excitement was limited, as well with regard to time as to place; that he was now and had always been fully sensible of the general zeal, diligence, and talent which I had put into the discharge of my duty, and that it would give him pleasure were I to take time to consider his proposition. I renewed the assurance of my great personal respect, and my readiness to conform to his wishes on all proper occasions. I remarked that, whatever zeal, diligence, and talent I possessed had been employed freely but firmly, and according to my best views of the public good; and that, as long as they were left to be so exerted, they were at the service of my country; but that the moment they were made to bow to military usurpation or political faction, there should be an end of their public exercise. We now parted with an understanding that I should leave Washington the following morning.

"It has been stated to me as a fact, to which I give the most reluctant belief, that on the morning of the 29th, and before my arrival in the city, a committee of the inhabitants of Georgetown, of whom Alexander C. Hanson, editor of the Federal Republican, was one, had waited on the President *by deputation*, and had obtained from him a promise that I should no longer direct the military defences of the District. On this fact all commentary is unnecessary.

"It but remains to exhibit and answer the several charges raised against me, and which form the groundwork of that excitement to which the President has deemed it prudent to sacrifice his authority in declining to support mine. They are as follows, viz.:

"1st. That (from ill will to the District of Colum-

bia and a design to remove the seat of government) I gave orders for the retreat of the army in the affair of the 24th ult., under circumstances not making retreat necessary or proper.

"This charge has not for its support the shadow of truth. The commanding general will do me the justice to say that I gave him no such order, and that he would is under the impression that the retreat was made earlier than I believed it to be proper. To the President I appeal whether I did not point out the disorder and retreat of a part of the first line soon after the action began, and stigmatize it as base and infamous.

"2d. That, in despite of the remonstrances of General Winder, and by the interposition of my authority, I had prevented him from defending the capital.

"This charge contains in it a total perversion of the truth. When the head of the retiring column reached the capital, it was halted for a moment. General Winder here took occasion to state to Mr. Monroe and myself that he was not in condition to maintain another conflict, and that his force was broken down by fatigue and dispersion. Under this representation, we united in opinion that he should proceed to occupy the heights of Georgetown.

"3d. That I had withdrawn the covering party from the rear of Fort Washington, and had ordered Captain Dyson to blow up the fort without firing a gun.

"This charge is utterly devoid of truth. The covering party was withdrawn by an order from General Winder, and Captain Dyson's official report shows

that the orders under which he acted were derived from the same source, though, no doubt, mistaken or misrepresented.

"4th. That by my orders the navy-yard had been burned. This, like its predecessor, is a positive falsehood.

"Perceiving that no order was made for apprising Commodore Tingey of the retreat of the army, I sent Major Bell to communicate the fact, and to say that the navy-yard could no longer be covered. The commodore was, of course, left to follow the suggestions of his own mind, or to obey the orders, if orders had been given, of the Navy Department.

"5th. And, lastly, that means had not been taken to collect a force sufficient for the occasion.

"As the subject of this charge may very soon become one of Congressional inquiry, I shall at present make but a few remarks:

"1st. *That no means within reach of the War Department had been omitted or withheld; that a separate military district, embracing the seat of government, had been created; that an officer of high rank and character had been placed in charge of it; that to him was given full authority to call for supplies, and for a militia force of* fifteen thousand men; *that to this force was added the* 36*th regiment of the line, a battalion of the* 38*th, detachments of the* 12*th, of the artillery, and of the dragoons, the marine corps, and the crews of the flotilla, under the special command of Commodore Barney, making a total of* 16,300 *men.*

"General Winder's official report of the engagement

of the 24th ult. shows how much of this force had been assembled, and the causes why a greater portion of it had not been got together. These will be found to have been altogether extraneous from the government, and entirely beyond its control; and,

"2d. That from what is now known of the enemy's force, of the loss he sustained in the enterprise, of the marks of panic under which he retreated, &c., &c., it is obvious that if all the troops assembled at Bladensburg had been faithful to themselves and to their country, the enemy would have been beaten and the capital saved. (Signed), JOHN ARMSTRONG.

"Baltimore, Sept. 3, 1814."

Either we have grossly erred in interpreting the import of General Armstrong's language, or the reader who will carefully peruse that portion of his letter which we have taken the liberty to italicize must concur with us in the inference that it was written with a full consciousness of the unfavorable impression it would create upon the public mind against the commanding general. We have certainly understood it as designed to convey the idea that General Winder had neither judiciously exercised the "full authority" vested in him, nor skilfully used the ample means placed under his control by the War Department. The "total of 16,300 men" makes a formidable and imposing show on paper, and "the public," to whose supreme tribunal this letter was an avowed appeal, being gravely informed that the commanding general had *full authority* to call out this adequate force, could hardly avoid the inference that this officer had

failed in the proper execution of his duty. It is true that in the next paragraph the writer refers to the official report of General Winder to show how much of this force had been assembled, and the reasons why a greater portion of it had not been *got together*. But many of those to whom General Armstrong's letter was addressed had probably never seen, or would have an opportunity of seeing General Winder's official report; and the singular expression which he uses in referring to the causes why a larger number of troops "had not been *got together*" leads directly to the inference that something had been omitted on the part of somebody which ought not to have been omitted; and upon whom could the blame of this omission fall but upon the commanding general? And this inference is strengthened by what is afterward said, namely, that the causes were "altogether extraneous from the government, and entirely beyond its control." By *the government* the writer must of course have meant the War Department, which had been, or ought to have been, entirely under his own management, and the wisdom, prudence, and forethought of which he was then particularly defending.

From these considerations, little as we are disposed to countenance the high-wrought excitement which lost all sense of propriety and justice in its assaults upon the integrity of General Armstrong, we are compelled to believe that, in his famous letter to the public, he intended that some, at least, of the general indignation should be transferred from himself to General Winder for neglect or inefficiency in matters in which that officer was certainly not justly chargeable with any fault whatever.

There is one remarkable statement in this letter which we feel it to be our duty to bring more particularly to the notice of the reader, not only because we happen to know that it was utterly unfounded, but because, even had it been true, it was not a matter which it became General Armstrong to introduce in an appeal to the public. We allude to the information which he says he received from a source entitled to his confidence, that "a committee of the inhabitants of Georgetown, of whom Alexander C. Hanson, editor of the Federal Republican, was one, had waited on the President, by deputation, and had obtained from him a promise that [he] should no longer direct the military defences of the District." Whatever may have been the source from which the writer of the letter derived his information, we take it upon us to say that it was untrue in every part of it. No such committee from Georgetown, with or without Mr. Hanson, ever waited on the President for any such purpose. Even the "*reluctant* belief" which General Armstrong yielded to the statement shows that he was more ready to put faith in the veracity of his informant than to believe the positive declaration of the President. Indeed, it shows that he did not even allow him credit for the common share of astuteness which a very little experience gives to every politician. This will be manifest upon the slightest review of the conversation, as detailed by General Armstrong himself, between him and the President. "On the *evening* of the 29th ultimo, the President *called at my lodgings*," says the retired secretary, and after stating the "delicacy" of the situation in which he had been placed by the ex-

citement existing among the militia of the District, told him frankly "that *an officer* of that corps had given him notice that they would no longer obey," &c., &c. Now if "a committee of the inhabitants of Georgetown" had waited on him for that purpose, was it not more reasonable to suppose that the President would have mentioned that circumstance as affording him a much stronger justification for pressing upon his secretary a compliance with his wishes than the plain fact that he had been moved to it by the information received from a single individual, "*an* officer?" Surely his visit at so unseasonable an hour, at a boarding-house where the secretary lodged, and the very remarkable colloquy which he there held with him, would have seemed less anomalous and more excusable if he had been impelled to it by the representations of a "deputation" from a neighboring city than by a simple notice given to him by "an officer" of the militia, particularly when that officer was not their commander. It is marvelous that this consideration did not suggest to General Armstrong the want of verisimilitude in the statement afterward made to him, however willing he might have been to discredit the word of the chief magistrate. It can only be explained on the supposition that he saw at once how readily such a statement, whether true or false, could be turned to his advantage in the appeal he was making to the public, by diverting their attention in some measure from too critical an inquiry into his own conduct, and fixing it upon this evidence of culpable weakness in the President. But he was no tyro in the art of addressing the people.

The "officer" alluded to by Mr. Madison in the conversation detailed by General Armstrong happened to be the author of this work. Being at the time the brigade major and inspector of the militia under the command of Brigadier-general Walter Smith, he was sent by that officer, accompanied by his aid-de-camp, T. L. M'Kenney, to communicate verbally to the President the fact that his brigade had held a meeting, at which they had passed a formal and unanimous resolution that they would no longer serve under the orders or military administration of General Armstrong, whom they denounced in no measured terms as having been the willing cause of the destruction of the City of Washington. However ready the bearer of this extraordinary verbal message to the President was, in the excitement and mortification of the moment, to sympathize with his fellow-soldiers in their indignant denunciation of the Secretary of War, and to participate fully in their desire to have him dismissed, the snows of forty winters since that time have cooled his passions and sobered his judgment in the matter. Whatever else it has been or may become his duty to say of the conduct of General Armstrong, in relation to the defence of the District of Columbia, in the course of these pages, justice to the memory of a Revolutionary soldier demands the concession that his faults were not such as to justify the grave charge alleged against him. That he had no sympathies in common with the people of the District, and would have been glad to see the seat of government removed, he was not at all solicitous to conceal; but that he would have been willing to tarnish the honor of his

country, and disgrace himself by a deliberate act of treachery to accomplish his wishes in that respect, there is nothing on record sufficient to authorize a belief. It has already been shown, and occasions will occur in the progress of this volume still farther to show, that he was culpable, either as the official organ of another or in the exercise of his own blinded judgment, of many errors of omission and commission in preparing for the defence of the seat of government; but the strong influence of heated passions, the madness of disappointed hopes no longer exists as an excuse for attributing them to intentional design.

The verbal information just spoken of was communicated to the President on the morning of the 29th of August, and, as the letter of General Armstrong states, it was on the evening of the same day that he called at the lodgings of that gentleman, and held with him the conversation which is repeated with such circumstantial minuteness in General Armstrong's appeal to the public. That the President was influenced to make that visit, and to say what is reported to have been said by him, by the information received from the officer mentioned, would be hardly credible, were it not that he himself, according to General Armstrong, assigned it as his motive for urging his temporary retirement from the War Department. We will not pretend to decide whether in this the President acted with the dignity becoming his high station—whether he permitted his fears to be too easily wrought upon by inadequate causes, or whether he was glad to seize upon any pretext to get rid of a member of his cabinet in whom he was determined no longer to confide; but

we do not hesitate to say that our republic has had presidents from whom the officer who bore such a verbal message would not have obtained such prompt satisfaction for his constituents.

The law of self-defence certainly authorizes a resort both to weapons and arguments, which, under ordinary circumstances, would be looked upon as unmanly and unjustifiable. In addition to the public exposure of a conversation manifestly intended to be private, General Armstrong introduces the name of the "editor of the Federal Republican" as one of the advisers of the President. This was the "unkindest cut of all;" for, unless the President were the weakest, the most forgiving of human beings, that "editor" was one of the last men in the community who could have moved him to the "promise" of dismissing one of his cabinet. The "editor" was also a member of Congress, and no man knew better than General Armstrong that he never lost an opportunity, in either capacity, of uttering the severest sarcasms against the President and his cabinet. Standing as they did toward each other, it was quite as incredible that the one should volunteer his advice, as that the other should be governed by it in so important a matter as that which the letter discloses. But it suited the purposes of the writer to give a "reluctant belief" to the story; and at a moment when the class of politicians to which the "editor of the Federal Republican" belonged was in so small a minority, it must be confessed that the introduction of his name in such a connection was a stroke of policy worthy of the writer of the Newburgh Addresses, and admirably devised to have its effect upon "the public."

It would naturally lead a great many persons to believe that the ex-secretary had been the innocent victim of "*federal*" *persecution*, acting through the amiable weakness and credulity of the chief magistrate; and such, indeed, to a considerable extent, was the impression it made. Whatever other faults "the public" might be disposed to attribute to General Armstrong, they knew that his *politics* were those of a staunch Republican—one of the overwhelming majority—while "Alexander C. Hanson" was quite as well known to be a fiery, fearless leader among the antipodes of the ruling party—one of that class of Federalists so violent in their opposition to the war. He was farther known to "the public" of Baltimore as having been, in times past, prominently connected with the famous "Charles Street Garrison," which first excited and then defied the great mob which left its bloody impress so deeply stamped upon that city, as, for a time, even to give it another name. It may be readily imagined, then, that if there was one of that stamp of Federalists who bore a larger share than another of the hatred and malediction of the mass of the dominant party, it was this same "editor of the Federal Republican." A pretext for the introduction of his name, therefore, into an appeal to the people, was readily seized by General Armstrong. He proved how well he knew "the public" to whom he was addressing himself, when he added, "on this fact all comment is unnecessary;" and it proved, too, how little he cared upon whom his Parthian arrow, thus shot as he retreated, should light.

It is not our purpose to impugn the veracity of Gen-

eral Armstrong himself in relation to this matter; on the contrary, we are ready to admit not only that such a statement was made to him, but that he believed it to be true. But, inasmuch as the character of the President of the United States was at stake on the question of its truth or falsehood, we think it must be conceded that, before he ventured to make the statement public, he owed it not less to his own self-respect than to the previous relation between himself and the chief magistrate to have ascertained the truth of it. He must have been conscious that when he published the fact of his belief in the statement, however reluctantly he admitted that belief, the public would take it for granted that he had lost every lingering remnant of respect he entertained, or professed to entertain, for the man who had bestowed his office upon him, and that this would produce an impression more or less injurious to the reputation of the highest functionary of the government. It would be difficult for the most charitable reader to resist the conviction that such was the intention of the retiring secretary. Before we close our comments upon this very remarkable piece of history—and we trust that the intimate bearing of it upon the subject in hand will plead our excuse for dwelling upon it so long—we think it worthy of note that the appeal of General Armstrong to the public, containing the unfortunate statement referred to, was copied into the "Federal Republican" of the 8th of September without a single remark. Its editor did not say a word in contradiction of the story that *he* had been one of the "deputation" from Georgetown who waited upon the President to insist on his dismissal of the

Secretary of War. What his reasons were for remaining silent as to the truth or falsehood of a statement which he could not but have known would operate greatly to the discredit of the President, and in so far give the advantage to the retired Secretary of War, we can not so much as form a rational conjecture, unless it were that he regarded it as a matter of perfect indifference to him which of the two great men "the public" might choose to condemn. The columns of his paper bear witness that he held them both in contempt, if such a sentiment can be compatible with the bitterness of vituperation which he continued to pour out against each as they came respectively under his notice; and if the result of the statement should be the public reprobation of either, it would be so far a triumph to his own influence. The National Intelligencer, however, the official paper of the administration, did not suffer the extraordinary tale to pass very long without contradiction. On the 13th of September there appeared in that journal the following short editorial paragraph: "Many of our readers will be pleased to learn that General Armstrong was misinformed as to the fact that 'Alexander C. Hanson, editor of the Federal Republican,' was one of the deputation which he states to have waited on the President of the United States from Georgetown on the morning of the 29th ultimo, and, indeed, as to the fact that any deputation waited on the President *from Georgetown* on that occasion." This contradiction the editors, no doubt, received from the lips of the President himself, with whom one of them had long been on terms of close intimacy, and it serves to confirm what has been

already said as to the part which General Smith's brigade-major and inspector had in the affair. The words "*from Georgetown*" being italicized, as we have given them, in the National Intelligencer, would seem to justify the inference that a deputation did in reality wait upon the President from some other place. But such an occurrence could hardly have been managed with so much secrecy as to keep it from the knowledge of the citizens of either of the two cities; and as we never heard of such a deputation, we take it for granted that the words italicized were not intended to lead to that inference. General Armstrong's own account of the conversation held between the President and himself shows that the former urged the expediency of the secretary's retiring for a time from the duties of the War Department solely upon the ground of the information communicated to him by an officer of the militia. This paragraph in the National Intelligencer was also left without notice of any kind by the person to whom it referred.

CHAPTER VII.

Mr. Madison's private Opinion of the Conduct of the Secretary of War.

We enter upon the subject of this chapter with some reluctance. In the first place, the apprehension that our readers may charge us with a deliberate attempt to test the extent of their patience by continuing to keep before them a subject upon which so much has already been said, and, in the second place, an indisposition to accumulate imputations upon the memory of one who can no longer hear or rebut them, had, by their joint influence, almost determined us at one time to strike out the last chapter altogether, that it might not impose on us the necessity of following it up by such an exhibition as we are now to make. We believed we had done with General Armstrong's letter to the Baltimore Patriot; but, after we had written our last comments upon it, we became aware, for the first time, by mere accident, that among the unpublished papers of Mr. Madison, in the possession of an old friend, there was a memorandum made by him (Mr. Madison) at the time of the conversation which he held with the Secretary of War on the occasion of his visiting him at his lodgings on the evening of the 29th of August. We believed it to be our duty immediately to seek permission to see these papers, and, if possible, to obtain a copy of them for insertion in this history. The former was granted to us without hesi-

tation, but the permission to copy them *in extenso* was politely but peremptorily declined, with the kind salvo, however, that we might *read* them as often as we pleased, and make such memoranda from them as might serve to impress their contents upon our memory. We were entirely satisfied with the reasons assigned by our friend for thus limiting the permission given, and set about immediately to make the best use we could of repeated visits to the precious MSS. We found in them much to elucidate what we had otherwise been unable to comprehend or to reconcile with the relations which ought to have subsisted between the President and his secretary, and we were gratified to find in them full confirmation of what we had already said as to the state of those relations at the time of the cabinet meeting on the 1st of July. It is due to the memory of Mr. Madison that his version of the interview with General Armstrong should be known as well as that of the latter; and we feel such confidence in our recollection of the memorandum, that we have no hesitation in pledging ourselves to the correctness of the compend we now give; not that we pretend to remember in every case the precise language of Mr. Madison, but that we adhere accurately to the substance, the meaning as he intended to be understood.

There is little or no difference between the statements of Mr. Madison and General Armstrong as to the introductory portion of the conversation, except that the President mentioned the name of Mr. Monroe (who had performed the duties of Secretary of War during the temporary absence of General Armstrong), and contrasted the alacrity with which the militia offi-

cers had obeyed all his suggestions with the spirit of resistance which had been manifested by them since the return of General Armstrong. It will be recollected by some of our readers that the latter had been for some days at Fredericktown, the appointed place of rendezvous for the executive officers in the event of the occupation of the city by the enemy, from which place he had just returned a few hours before the interview. It was probably this mention of Mr. Monroe, as so acceptable to the militia, which excited General Armstrong to use the harsh terms he did in speaking of the citizens of the District—terms, however, which it does not appear that he used before Mr. Madison, but only in his letter to the public. His reply to the President's allusion to the excitement against them both, was dignified and manly. He acknowledged that he was fully aware of the bitter feelings against himself, but he knew them to be founded on the most palpable falsehoods, and limited to the cities of Washington and Georgetown; that he was willing to give up his appointment by immediate resignation, or to retire from the scene by making a visit to his family in the State of New York. To this the President responded that a resignation under such circumstances was by no means desirable, as it might receive constructions which would not be agreeable either in a public or private view; that a temporary retirement, as he suggested, though equally subject, in some respects, to unpleasant comments, was, upon the whole, less objectionable than resignation, and would be a relief from existing embarrassments, without precluding any future course which might be thought best. General

Armstrong repeated that the charges against him were groundless, and limited in the excitement they had produced, and affirmed that his conduct in relation to the defence of the city had proved that there had been no deficiency on his part. The President said he knew that some of the particular charges brought against him were destitute of foundation, and that, so far as the discontents were produced by them, they would, of course, be limited, both as to time and space; that he suspected that the discontents sprung, in a great measure, from a rooted belief that he had not taken a sufficient interest in the defence of the city, nor promoted the measures for it; and that, considering the heavy calamity that had fallen on the place and its inhabitants, it was natural that strong feelings should be excited on the spot; and, as the place was the capital of the nation, the same feeling would exist every where; and he added that it would not be easy to satisfy the nation that the event was without blame somewhere, and he could not, in candor, say that all had been done that ought to have been done, and at the proper time. The secretary again returned to an exculpation of himself, and remarked that he had omitted no preparations whatever for the safety of the city *which had been enjoined on him.* To this the President replied that, regarding their conversation as a frank one, he could not admit the latter justification; that it was the duty of the Secretary of War *not only to execute plans enjoined on him, and orders committed to him*, but to devise and prepare such as would, in his own opinion, be necessary and proper; that this was an obvious and essential part of his

charge, and that, in what related to military plans and proceedings elsewhere, he had never been backward or scrupulous in taking such a course; that he must well know that he had, on some occasions, taken a latitude in this respect not at all satisfactory. The President added that it was due to truth and to himself to say, that he—the Secretary of War—had never appeared to enter into a just view either of the danger to be apprehended to the city, or of the consequences of its falling into the hands of the enemy; that he had never proposed or suggested a single precaution or arrangement for its safety, every thing done on that subject having been brought forward by the President; and that the apparent difference of their views on that subject had led him—the President—to reduce his arrangements to the minimum, in order to obtrude the less on a reluctant execution. The President also reminded him that he had even fallen short of the preparations decided on in the cabinet, particularly in not having arms and equipments brought to convenient dépôts, some of the militia, when called for the defence, being obliged, before they could obey the call, to procure those indispensable appurtenances of a soldier from Harper's Ferry. In conclusion, the President remarked—as if willing to show that his visit had not been made in a spirit of unkindness—that it was not agreeable to speak as he had spoken, nor would he have done so on any less urgent occasion; that he had selected General Armstrong for the office from a respect for his talents, and a confidence that he would exert them for the public good; that he had always treated him with friendship and confidence; and that, as his

public career would in a little while be closed, his great wish, next to leaving his country in a state of peace and prosperity, was, that he might be able to preserve harmony and avoid changes in his political family; and that, as the secretary well knew, he had for that reason acquiesced in many things to which no other consideration could have reconciled him.

The reader will probably recollect the opinions and suggestions said by General Armstrong, in his letter to the chairman of the committee of investigation, to have been offered by him in reply to questions submitted by the President to the heads of departments at this convocation of the 1st of July. He may also recollect that no other member of the cabinet, all of whom had been called upon to answer the same inquiries of the committee, had in his statement mentioned, or even made the slightest allusion to the fact, that the Secretary of War had offered any opinions or suggestions whatever to the meeting; that not one of them spoke of the two questions put by the President, and to which General Armstrong said he replied. This silence of all General Armstrong's colleagues as to his having offered any opinions or made any suggestions on the subject they were called to discuss might justify a surmise that he had probably mistaken his consciousness of what he ought to have said for what he actually did say. Mr. Monroe, Mr. Jones, and Mr. Rush all limit his share in the discussion at that meeting to a bare statement of the forces that might most readily be brought together. This important memorandum of Mr. Madison, the substance of which, at least, we are confident has been correctly given, would

not only confirm such a surmise, inferred from their silence, but it seems directly and positively to contradict every material statement made by General Armstrong, not only in his letter to the committee, but in his previous attempt to exculpate himself before the public. It is here asserted by Mr. Madison not only that he offered no opinions at that meeting of the cabinet, but that he had never, on any occasion, proposed or suggested a single precaution or arrangement for the safety of the city, and that he had even fallen short of the preparations decided on in the cabinet. General Armstrong, on the contrary, after repeating to the committee the statements and opinions which he tells them were offered in reply to the President's questions, makes the farther assertion that, "*conformably to these opinions*, an order was taken to assemble a corps and form a camp at such point between the City of Washington and Baltimore as might be selected by the commanding general."

We shall not undertake to decide which of these discordant statements is most worthy of credit. That of General Armstrong, it is true, stands alone, unsupported by a single corroborative fact, while that of Mr. Madison is indirectly confirmed by the silence of all the members of his cabinet whose letters are mentioned in the report of the Congressional committee. Yet it is an extravagant supposition that General Armstrong would, within so short a time after the meeting of the cabinet referred to, address a false statement to a committee of Congress, the falsity of which could not fail to be observed, if not exposed, by his former colleagues.

There is another portion of Mr. Madison's statement which, were it not that all his unpublished papers will sooner or later be incorporated with the history of his times, we should certainly refrain from speaking of here; but it belongs essentially to the subject of General Armstrong's fitness for the post he occupied, and seems necessary to the rightful understanding of what we had attributed to the weak and vacillating policy of Mr. Madison in all that concerned the preparations for the defence of the seat of government. Those who are at all acquainted with the history of the period of which we are now speaking can not but know that the appointment of General Armstrong to the War Department occasioned no little surprise. His peculiar temper and turn of mind were supposed to be entirely uncongenial with the official and confidential relations in which he must necessarily stand with the President. He was known to be cold and repulsive in his manners, pertinacious and opinionated; while Mr. Madison possessed a suavity of temper, a courteous amenity of deportment, which could not but stand in disagreeable contrast with the imperious temperament of a subordinate older than himself. If at any time a difference of opinion should arise between them on a question of grave interest, it was feared that the President would be the first to yield. Such objections prevailed to so great an extent, that when the nomination of General Armstrong was sent to the Senate it was confirmed only by a bare majority. The President was fully aware of the character of the individual and of the objections against him when he made the appointment; but after the resignation of Mr. Eustis, strange as it

may seem in these altered times, when office is so eagerly sought after, he experienced great difficulty in finding any one willing to accept. Several citizens, who would have been eminently acceptable to the public and to the army, had successively declined it, and the high post of Secretary of War was literally "going a begging." In this extraordinary dilemma, some friends whom the President highly esteemed, and in whose judgment he had great reliance, urged upon him the appointment of General Armstrong. Knowing that he possessed talents fully adequate to the station, and believing that his military knowledge and experience might be rendered eminently useful, by a conciliatory confidence and the judicious interposition of a controlling power on his own part, he did not hesitate to sacrifice his own objections to the strong recommendations of his friends. He was probably somewhat influenced, too, by the hope that the peculiarities of temper ascribed to the individual would meet with nothing to call them forth in the new associations by which he would be surrounded, and that his own love of quiet and harmony would be reflected in the conduct and deportment of those whom he distinguished by selecting them as his daily companions and counselors.

It may be admitted that these considerations were sufficient to justify the President in the appointment of General Armstrong to the War Department, but we have seen from his notes of the memorable interview just recorded that his generous anticipations and hopes were sadly disappointed. General Armstrong had been but a short time at the head of the Department of

War before he began to think, as it appears, that he was placed there to command and control by his own monocratic will rather than to suggest or execute under the higher power of another. He soon took the liberty of acting not only without consultation with his chief, but in direct opposition to his expressed will. It is not every one who would excuse the President's forbearance in this instance, or admit the force of his reasons for it. If the disappointments he was doomed to experience in his relation with the Secretary of War had concerned himself alone, the patience he evinced under them might be admired as the commendable exercise of a Christian virtue; but, unfortunately, more important considerations than those that touched the personal feelings of the President were involved in the proper or improper discharge of the functions of the officer at the head of the War Department. That the country was at war, so far from its being a satisfactory reason for bearing with the freaks of temper which certainly unfitted the incumbent of that department for the prompt and efficient discharge of his duties, rather than encounter again the difficulty of finding one willing and qualified to take it, might have been regarded by others than the President as a circumstance beyond all others rendering the dismissal necessary.

From the time at which the President was made aware of the state of affairs in Europe—which, from a letter found among his papers, we are enabled to state was on the 20th of May, while at his country-seat in Virginia—to the middle of July, he had abundant opportunities of knowing that the Secretary of War did

not participate in his own apprehensions that the seat of government would become a favorite object of enterprise to the enemy, and that he, in truth, treated all the suggestions made to him of the necessity of preparations for defence with indifference, if not contemptuous neglect. That the President was sincere in these apprehensions was certainly not doubted by any other member of his cabinet, for they all testify to his repeated, and urgent, and anxious expressions of solicitude, and of his opinion that immediate preparations ought to be made. When he found that the Secretary of War took no notice of his hints and suggestions, and that even after the cabinet meeting he did not attempt to carry into effect the decision to which they had come until peremptorily ordered to do so, duty to the country would seem to have required him, no matter what personal or private considerations interposed objections to the course, to have made the change in the War Department so evidently demanded by his own statements of the case.

It will not be thought, we trust, that we are dwelling too long or too minutely on the antecedents of this inglorious day. In all preparatory measures, in the provision of means for defence, as well as in the subsequent appliance of those means, it behooves to seek for the causes of that discomfiture. From the result of our examination of the official records and reports, aided by our own personal knowledge and recollection of the state of things at the period of which we are speaking, we have been forced to the conclusion, as the reader will have seen, that there was unreasonable delay in the preparation of the means of defence,

that the means provided were inadequate, and that the organization and arrangements of the forces called into service were made without, and in some instances against, the advice and concurrence of the commanding general. These were faults which no historian could honestly overlook, and the only question for him to decide was, To whom were they to be ascribed? The answer could not be fairly given without implicating some portion of the executive department of the government. It may be thought by many persons, perhaps, that only one individual of that department could be held officially responsible for the unfortunate consequences of these faults. It was the duty of the Secretary of War, according to the opinion of most persons, to have devised, proposed, and recommended such measures of preparation as his presumed knowledge and experience in military affairs might suggest to his mind as most expedient and proper. This is undoubtedly true as far as it goes; but if his knowledge and experience taught him to believe that there was no danger of invasion, and therefore no necessity for preparation against it, or if, for any other reason, he neglected to perform the duty appertaining to the head of the War Department, are we to seek no further for responsibility in a matter in which the whole nation was interested?

CHAPTER VIII.

Landing of the British Troops at Benedict.—Uncertainty as to their Destination.—Nature and Amount of the American Force.—Plan of Operations dictated to the Commanding General.

THE predatory warfare carried on by the British during the years 1813 and 1814 on the shores of the Chesapeake was somewhat in contrast with the "war of the Titans" which they were waging at the same time on the other side of the Atlantic. While, in Europe, military operations were conducted on a gigantic scale, and grand armies were disputing the possession of principalities, kingdoms, and empires, in our humble portion of the globe the armed hosts of his Britannic majesty were employed in robbing hen-roosts and pig-styes. Their military skill, valor, and enterprise were signalized in such exploits as plundering and burning farm-houses; robbing defenceless men, women, and children of the clothing on their backs; in breaking open family vaults, searching for jewelry, and making prizes of fresh winding-sheets; carousing in churches; stripping old men naked, pricking them with bayonets, and slapping their faces in sport; and, in order to inspire horror and hatred, as well as contempt and detestation, violating females in the presence of their fathers and husbands.*

* For the evidence and details of these outrages, see, in American State Papers, Military Affairs, vol. i., p. 339–382, the report made to Congress, July 31, 1813, on the "Spirit and Manner in which the

The presiding genius of this species of warfare, which would have disgraced banditti, and which savages would have recoiled from, was R R ADMIRAL SIR GEORGE COCKBURN; and he appears to have exercised his vocation *con amore*, with a zeal and energy which showed that he derived amusement as well as profit from his labors, and that he even enjoyed the infamous notoriety which he speedily acquired in all the country washed by the waters of the Chesapeake. Certainly, in this line of business, no man could have been a more valuable and faithful servant to his government, which proved its sagacity in the selection of him as much as it did subsequently in the choice of Sir Hudson Lowe as a jailer for Napoleon.* Cockburn

War is waged by the Enemy." See, also, Niles's Register, vol. vii., *passim*.

* Cockburn was selected to convey Napoleon to St. Helena, a duty which he discharged with tolerable decency, not insulting the illustrious captive more than once or twice during the passage. On one occasion he sarcastically remarked, in Napoleon's presence, that the latter had not "read Chesterfield;" from which it would seem that Cockburn regarded himself as a disciple of that philosopher. Napoleon, however, after he had had the opportunity to contrast Cockburn with Sir Hudson Lowe, spoke favorably of the admiral, and said of him to O'Meara, "He is not a man of a bad heart; on the contrary, I believe him to be capable of a generous action; but he is rough, overbearing, vain, choleric, and capricious; never consulting any body; jealous of his authority; caring little of the manner in which he exercises it, and sometimes violent without dignity." On another occasion, comparing Cockburn with Lowe, he said, "Cockburn was at least straightforward and sincere. He was a man—an Englishman; but, my God! as for this man (Lowe), nature intended him for a bad hangman."

It seems, according to O'Meara, that Cockburn, on visiting Paris after his return from St. Helena, expressed there a poor opinion of Napoleon's abilities, and said that, "on the score of talent, he was an ordinary character;" which being repeated by O'Meara to Napo-

possessed a fertile and inventive genius, indefatigable energy, a daring spirit of enterprise, with the least possible modicum of decency or humanity; and it appears that, like other distinguished characters who have been famous for house-breaking and highway robbery, he had a peculiar talent for disguising his person. He is known to have resided some time in Washington previous to the projected attack upon the city, and after its capture he called upon his landlady, a respectable widow, with whom he had boarded, and found some difficulty in persuading her of his identity, so complete had been the disguise. From his own personal observation, and from information communicated by spies, he obtained a minute and accurate knowledge of the topography of the surrounding country, the state of the defences and public resources, and the characters of public men.

It was not fully known until after the battle of Bladensburgh that the mode of warfare in which Cockburn took so much delight had received the sanction of the British government. But on the 18th of August, 1814, after the arrival of Vice Admiral Cochrane in the Patuxent, he addressed a communication to Mr. Monroe, then Secretary of State, in which he announced that, in retaliation for the "wanton destruction" committed by the American army in Upper Canada, and in order to compel reparation for it, he had been ordered "to destroy and lay waste such towns and districts upon the coast" as might be found assailable.

The delivery of this communication was delayed un-

leon, the latter quietly remarked that the opinion "paid a poor compliment to the discernment of the greatest part of the world."

til after the capture of Washington, certainly not from want of opportunities to transmit it, but lest the receipt of it should induce redoubled and effectual exertions to save the seat of government from falling into the possession of an enemy who openly avowed such infamous principles and purposes. The pretext put forth in Admiral Cochrane's letter was ably refuted in the reply addressed to him by Mr. Monroe, dated September 6, 1814. The real motive, elsewhere avowed, for resorting to a "system of devastation" which was admitted to be "contrary to the usages of civilized warfare," was to render the war unpopular in that section of the country which was supposed to have been most in favor of it, and make it hateful to the people by bringing its horrors home to their hearths and firesides.

The large increase of British force which arrived in the Chesapeake about the middle of August, 1814, left no shadow of doubt that an enterprise of somewhat greater magnitude was contemplated than the petty depredations hitherto committed. On the morning of the 16th of August, twenty-two sail of enemy's vessels came in from sea, and proceeded up the Chesapeake to join the force previously stationed at the mouth of the Patuxent. The whole force then ascended that river, and on the 19th commenced landing troops at the old village of Benedict, situated about forty miles southeast of Washington. The intelligence was promptly received in Washington, and the questions at once arose, What is the object of the enemy? Which is the contemplated point of attack?

Mr. Monroe, in his letter to the committee of investigation, says:

"Calling on the President on the morning of the 18th of August, he informed me that the enemy had entered the Patuxent in considerable force, and were landing at Benedict. I remarked that this city [Washington] was their object. He concurred in the opinion. I offered to proceed immediately to Benedict with a troop of horse to observe their force, report it, with my opinion of their objects, and, should they advance on this city, to retire before them, communicating regularly their movements to the government. This proposal was acceded to. Captain Thornton, of Alexandria, was ordered to accompany me with a detachment of twenty-five or thirty of the dragoons of the District. I set out about one o'clock P.M. on the 19th, and arrived at ten next morning in sight of the enemy's squadron lying before Benedict, and continued to be a spectator of their movements until after the action at Bladensburg on the 24th."

The opinion of the President and Mr. Monroe appears to have been a reasonable one; for, in reply to a suggestion that the enemy's destination might be either Washington, or Annapolis, or Baltimore, it might be asked, Why should they land troops at Benedict, to give them a long march through a hostile country to either of the two last-mentioned places, when they could so easily transport them up the Chesapeake and debark them within a few miles of the place of attack? The land route from Benedict was the worst that they could have selected to Baltimore or Annapolis, and the best and shortest to Washington.

Nevertheless, the Secretary of War, whose opinion was of the most importance, as well from his position at the head of that department, which gave him the immediate control of the means relied on to repel the enemy, as from the superior military knowledge and acumen which he was supposed to possess, derided the notion that the British intended a visit to Washington. In the statement made to the committee by General Van Ness, one of the most prominent citizens of Washington, he says:

"At length, in August last, when the increased and re-enforced fleet, with the troops, ascended the Chesapeake, and were known from authentic information to have entered the Patuxent, I called on Secretary Armstrong again, and expressed, as usual, my apprehensions, arising from want of means and preparations, adding that, from the known naval and reputed land force of the enemy, he probably meant to strike a serious blow. His reply was, 'Oh yes; by G—d, they would not come with such a fleet without meaning to strike somewhere, but they certainly will not come here. What the d—l will they do here?' etc. After remarking that I differed very much from him as to the probable interest they felt in destroying or capturing our seat of government, and that I believed a visit to this place would, for several reasons, be a favorite object with them, he observed, 'No, no; Baltimore is the place, sir; that is of so much more consequence.'"

In his Notices of the War of 1812,* General Armstrong persists in the opinion that the "first and great object" of the enemy in proceeding to Benedict was

* Vol. ii., p. 125, 126.

"the punishment of Barney and the destruction of his flotilla," and that the visit to Washington was a casual suggestion subsequently made by Cockburn to General Ross.

General Winder inclined from the first to the belief that the enemy intended an attack on Annapolis, and the reasons which he states in his narrative for this impression are not wanting in force. He says,

"It brought him to a fine port, where his ships could lie in safety; it afforded abundant and comfortable quarters for his men, magazines and store-houses for all his stores and munitions of every description; was capable, with very little labor, of being made impregnable by land, and he commanded the water; it was the nearest point of debarkation to the City of Washington without entering a narrow river liable to great uncertainty in its navigation from adverse winds, and was at hand to Baltimore, equally threatening these two great points, and rendering it absolutely necessary to keep a force doubly sufficient to resist him—one for the protection of Washington, the other for Baltimore. The squadron which was ascending the Potomac, and had now passed the Kettle Bottoms, the only obstruction in the navigation of the river, might be only a feint, the more effectually to conceal their intentions against Annapolis; or, what was more probable, was intended to unite with the land force, and co-operate in a joint attack on Washington. It was, therefore, strongly believed that the land force was destined to proceed and take Fort Washington in the rear."

General Winder's doubts as to the object and des-

tination of the enemy continued from the time of the debarkation at Benedict on the 18th of August, until within three hours of the commencement of the battle at Bladensburg on the 24th. In his narrative, referring to his own position at the Eastern Branch Bridge, near the Navy-yard, between nine and ten o'clock of the morning of the battle, he says,

"My patrols and vedettes not having yet brought me any intelligence of a movement of the enemy [from his bivouac, about twelve miles from Washington], and being still doubtful whether he might not move upon Annapolis, Fort Warburton [Fort Washington], or toward the bridge rather than Bladensburg, I held the position near the bridge as that which, under all circumstances, would enable me best to act against the enemy in any alternative."

This continual uncertainty, as may well be imagined, had a most disastrous effect upon the military operations of this brief campaign of five days. All the force which could be assembled was considered insufficient for the protection of one point, and yet it was deemed necessary to protect three; and three avenues of approach to the seat of government were to be guarded—that by Bladensburg, that by the Eastern Branch Bridge, and an approach, in conjunction with the naval force, from Fort Washington. The great practical problem to solve was how to dispose of a force deemed inadequate for the protection of a single one of these approaches, so as to leave none of them unguarded; and the problem was rendered more difficult of solution by the topography of the country lying between the Eastern Branch of the Potomac and

the Patuxent River, which is generally well wooded, sparsely peopled, somewhat hilly, and intersected by numerous roads crossing each other, and leading to the different points which were supposed to be threatened, and which it was thought necessary to guard. The roads, too, were then, during a hot, dry spell of midsummer weather, in the best condition for marching, excepting only the annoyance of dust. A point might, after careful calculation and deliberation, be selected on one of these roads, and preparations made to receive the enemy, and it would be suddenly discovered, when too late, that he had turned into another road, one either leading him a little circuitously to the point which he appeared to menace, or directly to some other point equally in need of protection.

That the enemy had taken care to be well informed of the topography of the country is evident from the dispatch* of Admiral Cochrane to the Secretary of the Board of Admiralty, dated Tonnant, on the Patuxent, September 2, 1814, of which the following is an extract:

"My letters of the 11th of August will have acquainted their lordships of my waiting in the Chesapeake for the arrival of Rear Admiral Malcolm with the expedition from Bermuda.

"The rear admiral joined me on the 17th, and as I had gained information from Rear Admiral Cockburn, whom I found in the Potomac, that Commodore Barney, with the Baltimore flotilla, had taken shelter at the head of the Patuxent, this afforded a pretext for ascending that river to attack him near its source,

* See Niles's Register, vol. vii., Supplement, p. 145.

above Pig Point, while the ultimate destination of the combined force was Washington, should it be found that the attempt might be made with any prospect of success. To give their lordships a more correct idea of the place of attack, I send a sketch of the country, upon which the movements of the navy and army are portrayed. By it their lordships will observe that the best approach to Washington is by Port Tobacco, upon the Potomac, and Benedict, upon the Patuxent, from both of which are direct and good roads to that city, and their distances nearly alike. The roads from Benedict divide about five miles inland; the one by Piscataway and Bladensburg, the other following the course of the river, although at some distance from it, owing to the creeks that run up the country. This last passes through the towns of Nottingham and Marlborough to Bladensburg, at which town the river called the Eastern Branch, that bounds Washington to the eastward, is fordable, and the distance is about five miles. There are two bridges over this river at the city, but it is not to be expected that the enemy would leave them accessible to an invading army.

"Previously to my entering the Patuxent, I detached Captain Gordon, of his majesty's ship Seahorse, with that ship and the ships and bombs named in the margin, up the Potomac to bombard Fort Washington (which is situated on the left bank of that river, about ten or twelve miles below the city), with a view of destroying that fort and opening a free communication above, as well as to cover the retreat of the army, should its return by the Bladensburg road be found too hazardous, from the accession of strength

the enemy might obtain from Baltimore; it was also reasonable to expect that the militia from the country to the northward and westward would flock in as soon as it should be known that their capital was threatened.

"Captain Sir Peter Parker, in the Menelaus, with some small vessels, was sent up the Chesapeake above Baltimore, to divert the attention of the enemy in that quarter, and I proceeded, with the remainder of the naval force and the troops, up this river, and landed the army upon the 19th and 20th at Benedict."

From this it appears that the expedition to Washington had been concerted and determined upon, and even provision made "to cover the retreat of the army, should its return by the Bladensburg road be found too hazardous," before Admiral Cochrane entered the Patuxent, and that the destruction of Barney's flotilla was merely the pretext for ascending that river, instead of being the "first and great object." No doubt the real purpose in ascending the Patuxent with so large a force was carefully concealed from the subordinates of the expedition as long as practicable, lest it should, by their indiscretion, become known to us.

We shall now take a view of the means which General Winder possessed of repelling or operating against the enemy, whose strength was as little known as his determination and purposes.

The following is a statement, which we have endeavored to render as accurate as possible, of the greatest amount of force which, if the officers of the general government had done their duty, might have been concentrated in good order and condition at Bladensburg

or the City of Washington on the morning of the 24th of August. We have attempted a classification and brief description of the troops, and have noted the times at which the several corps were placed at the disposal of General Winder, or became available for the defence of the seat of government. The detail is rather uninteresting in itself, but we ask the reader's attention to it now, in order to obviate the necessity of tedious interruptions or repetitions in the subsequent course of our narrative.

1. We shall mention the District troops first, as they ought to have been, and in fact were, the first to be confronted with the enemy. They comprised the militia and volunteer companies of Washington and Georgetown, formed into two regiments, the 1st commanded by Colonel Magruder, the 2d by Colonel William Brent. The brigade was commanded by General Walter Smith, of Georgetown, and included two companies of light artillery, having each six six-pounders, and commanded respectively by Major George Peter, who had obtained a high reputation as an officer of experience and ability in the regular service, and Captain Benjamin Burch, a soldier of the Revolution. It also included two companies, under Captains Doughty and Stull, called riflemen, but armed with muskets, the Secretary of War having, according to General Smith's statement, "declined or refused to furnish rifles."* These troops were well disciplined, and com-

* This fact is well remembered by the author, for on its being made known, when Captain Stull's company were about being mustered into service, they at first peremptorily refused to march unless furnished with the proper arms.

prised, officers and men, some of the most respectable inhabitants of the District. The brigade marched from Washington on the 20th of August, and on the following morning was found to muster about 1070 men.

Another brigade of District militia, under the command of General Robert Young, consisted of militia and volunteer companies from Alexandria and its vicinity. It included a company of cavalry, under Captain Thornton, which acted as an escort to Colonel Monroe, and a company of artillery, with two brass six-pounders and one brass four-pounder, commanded by Captain Marsteller. The brigade mustered about 500 men, and General Young, in his letter to the committee, speaks in high terms of their efficiency. They were encamped and reported to General Winder on the 18th of August. The only use made of them was to defend the approach to Fort Washington, and they were, consequently, not present at the battle of Bladensburg.

2. The troops from the city of Baltimore and its vicinity consisted of two regiments of militia, one of 550 men, under Lieutenant-colonel Ragan (late captain United States Rifles), and another of 803 men, under Lieutenant-colonel Schutz, comprising the brigade commanded by General Stansbury; the 5th regiment under Lieutenant-colonel Joseph Sterett, consisting of volunteers from the city of Baltimore; two companies of volunteer artillery from the same city, under Captains Myer and Magruder, with six six-pounders; and a battalion of volunteer riflemen from Baltimore, under the command of the celebrated Will-

iam Pinkney, previously attorney-general and minister to England, and subsequently senator.

The brigade commanded by General Stansbury arrived at Bladensburg from Baltimore on the evening of the 22d of August. Lieutenant-colonel Sterett's regiment, 500 strong, the artillery, 150, and the rifle battalion, 150, reached Bladensburg about sunset on the evening before the battle. The whole force, amounting to about 2200, was placed by General Winder under the command of General Stansbury.

3. Various detachments of Maryland militia, comprising a portion of two regiments, 750 strong, under the command of Colonel William D. Beall, an officer of the Revolution, and Colonel Hood, which had marched sixteen miles on the morning of the day of battle, and entered Bladensburg about thirty minutes before the enemy; detachments of militia, under Lieutenant-colonel Kramer, consisting of 240 men; and two battalions, under Majors Waring and Maynard, of 150 each.

4. A regiment of Virginia militia, under the command of Colonel George Minor, consisting of about 600 infantry and 100 cavalry. These troops arrived in Washington on the evening of the 23d of August, but, owing to some mismanagement,* did not receive their complement of arms until the next day, too late to be present at the battle.

5. The regular infantry, under the command of Lieutenant-colonel William Scott, consisting of detachments from the 36th and 38th regiments, about 300 men, who were available from the commencement

* See Colonel Minor's letter, Appendix.

of the campaign, and a company of 80 from the 12th regiment, under the command of Captain Morgan, who joined the army at the Old Fields on the evening of the 22d of August.

6. The sailors of Barney's flotilla, 400, and the marines from Washington, 120 in number, with two eighteen-pounders and three twelve-pounders, joined General Winder at the Wood Yard on the morning of the 22d of August.

7. The cavalry consisted of a squadron of United States dragoons, under the command of Lieutenant-colonel Laval, 125 in number, recruits on untrained horses, who arrived in Washington on the morning of the 20th of August; and various companies of volunteer cavalry from the District, Maryland, and Virginia, under the command of Lieutenant-colonel Tilghman, Major Otho H. Williams, and Major Charles Sterett Ridgley—altogether about 300 in number, who were available at an early period of the campaign.

The whole would have constituted a force of about 7000 men, of which 900, including the seamen, marines, and Laval's cavalry, were enlisted men. The cavalry amounted altogether to more than 400, a part of it very efficient. There were in all 26 pieces of artillery, including 2 eighteen-pounders, 3 twelves, and 20 six-pounders.

With such a force, notwithstanding the unpromising aspect of a portion of it, a skilful and experienced commander, if left unshackled, might have effected something creditable to himself and to his country, even against an army as numerous and well appointed as that of the enemy was supposed to be; but in ad-

dition to the perplexing uncertainty as to the enemy's destination and strength, it is particularly necessary to bear also in mind, in forming a judgment of the preliminary as well as the closing operations of this campaign, that these operations lacked the great essential of all military movements, that of being governed by a single will or mind. The President of the United States is, by the highest law of the land, commander-in-chief of the army and navy, and President Madison was actually in the field and exercising command.* The Secretary of War is the channel of communication from the President to all officers of the army, high or low, and any suggestion or request from him is equivalent to an order. Secretary Armstrong was also in the field, and in addition to the authority of his official position, he was considered by many, and certainly considered himself, to possess profound military science, as well as some military experience. Colonel Monroe, the Secretary of State, from the outset took an active interest and share in the practical operations of the campaign. General Winder was under the immediate personal supervision of these high functionaries, all much older men than himself, and he, instead of having the *prestige* of a high military reputation to support him in case of difference of opinion, had yet a reputation to achieve.

This difficulty in the situation of General Winder is referred to in expressive terms by General Wilkin-

* "The President of the United States was not only active during the engagement which took place with the enemy, but had been exerting himself for two or three days previous, and has been personally active ever since. Every one joins in attributing to him the greatest merit."—*National Intelligencer*, August 30, 1814.

son, when speaking of the position of General Winder's forces on the night of the 23d of August. He says,

"There can be no doubt that this was an injudicious disposition of the American forces; but is General Winder to be condemned for it? I think not, because President Madison, by urging a concentration of his corps when so recently in camp at the Long Old Fields, had clearly indicated his determination to try the issue of a general action, and the general appears to have exerted every nerve to give effect to his plan; and in circumstances at once perplexing and equivocal, *none but a soldier, habituated to subordination, can feel the influence of an intimation from a superior, or interpret the force of his opinion.*"

It is true that General Winder, in his narrative, makes no attempt to evade responsibility by throwing it upon his advisers or supervisors, and even indirectly assumes blame, which, from the testimony of others, does not appear to belong to him. And General Armstrong, in his "Notices," labors to throw upon General Winder the whole responsibility of the management of the campaign, with the exception of that part which he attributes to his fellow-member of the cabinet, Colonel Monroe, whom he contemptuously terms a "busy and blundering tactician." Yet, even from so unfavorable a witness as General Armstrong, enough can be gathered to show that General Winder was the commanding general in little more than name, and that his movements were influenced, if not actually dictated, by his supervisors, who were neither in harmony among themselves, nor consistent any one with himself, and one of whom, General Armstrong, was not likely, from

his self-willed and resentful disposition, to be over-zealous in his efforts to produce a result which would justify Mr. Madison's selection of General Winder instead of General Porter as the commanding general.

In his statement to the committee of investigation, General Armstrong says:

"On the — of August was received the first notice of the arrival of Admiral Cochrane in the Bay, and on the same day advices were brought that he was entering and ascending the Patuxent. These facts were communicated to the general, and he was instructed to take a position near the enemy. On the 22d he was advised to hang on their rear and flank a heavy corps, while he opposed to them another in their front. My reasons for thus advising him were three: if Baltimore was the object of the enemy, this disposition interposed a corps between them and that city; if they aimed at Washington, it menaced their communication with their fleet, and the security of their return, and was, therefore, most likely to hold them in check; and, lastly, it did not forbid a concentration of force in their front at a later period and by a forced march. On the evening of the 22d I repaired to the army, and found it at the Old Fields, six or eight miles distant from the enemy. A part of the corps contemplated for the service mentioned in the preceding article had joined General Winder, and of the other part (under General Stansbury) no correct account could be given. I took this occasion to urge the necessity of a speedy concentration of our force, and of the usefulness of pushing our pickets frequently and freely upon those of the enemy, as the best means of circumscribing his supplies,

of gaining a knowledge of his strength (of which the accounts were various), and of preventing a stolen march, which was to be suspected. I was glad to find the general entertained similar views, and that they were in a train of execution. In the afternoon of the 23d I returned to Washington."

This statement of General Armstrong shows that the commanding general was, in the outset, "instructed to take a position near the enemy." An instruction from a military superior is nothing more nor less than order, which no officer, unless in extreme circumstances, would hesitate to obey or venture to criticise. Then the Secretary of War remains a whole day in the field or at the general's head-quarters, "advising" and "urging the necessity" of certain specific movements. What was this but taking out of his hands the direction of the campaign?

But this was not all the advice or dictation which emanated from the same high quarter. In the Appendix to the second volume of his "Notices" General Armstrong publishes, in his own justification, what he styles "Colonel Allen M'Clane's Journal of the Campaign." Colonel M'Clane, it seems, acted as a volunteer aid to General Winder, to whom he had been recommended by General Armstrong, and the following is the entry in his journal for the 19th of August:

"19th. Reports of yesterday confirmed, with the addition that the fleet had entered the Patuxent; was preparing armed boats for going up the river and landing troops at Benedict. Accompanied General Winder to the War-office. The general asked the secretary's opinion of the enemy's object; the latter replied 'that

the numbers, equipments, and movements of an enemy best indicated his object; of these, in the present case, we know too little to speak with any degree of assurance. With the exception of landing troops at Benedict, his great naval force, and the direction given to the movement, would indicate Baltimore; but, whether it be Baltimore, the flotilla, or Washington, our course is a plain one: assemble as large a force as we can; place it speedily at Nottingham, or other point on the Patuxent; clear the road between that and Benedict of horses and cattle; break down bridges; abbatis the route, when leading through woods; select strong points for defence; and, as soon as his movement begins, harass his front and flanks by small attacks made by night and by day, while Stuart operates in the same way on his rear. A plan of this kind, strictly pursued, will soon enable you to judge of the enemy's strength, equipment, and objects. If the first be small and the second scanty, his objects can not be great nor many—probably confined to an attack on Barney's flotilla. If, on the other hand, he shows a respectable park of artillery, with baggage and provision train, his object may be Baltimore or Washington.'"

The secretary's opinion of the "objects" of the enemy was somewhat in the style of the Delphic oracle or of Captain Jack Bunsby: the value of it consisted in the immense difficulty of making any thing out of it. But, whatever the enemy's objects might be, the advice as to the course to be pursued was minute and particular. The mode of proceeding was to be an offensive one. The general was to march in pursuit of the enemy, let the disparity of force be what it might,

and "harass his front and flanks by small attacks made by night and by day."

But, between the 19th and 23d, the secretary's opinion of the efficacy of offensive operations appears to have undergone a material change. In his journal for the 23d, Colonel M'Clane says:

"23d. At sunrise, the general and M'Clane visited the President. The ordinary compliments passed, the Secretary of War asked the general for such information as he had been able to procure with regard to the numbers and equipment of the enemy; to which he replied that Mr. Monroe and Colonel Beall, with the same means of observation, made very different estimates—the former making them 7000 men, the latter but 4000; that they came without cannon, cavalry, baggage, or provision train; that they had a few rocket-men, and a few (two or three) guns called grasshoppers, dragged by seamen; that their whole force, naval and military, was yet at Marlborough, plundering the tobacco warehouses; and from accounts received of the Potomac fleet, it was his opinion that they would not move till that fleet had approached Fort Washington, when Ross would move to the rear of the fort and co-operate in taking it. Without noticing this opinion, the secretary replied that 'the facts he had stated abundantly proved that hitherto Ross's movement had no object but that of covering and aiding the armed vessels destined to the attack of the flotilla; and that, should he make a movement directed on Washington, it will necessarily be a mere Cossack hurrah, a rapid march and hasty retreat, coming, as he does, wholly unprepared for siege and investment. To meet an attack of this

kind, two modes of proceeding may be suggested, the one strictly offensive, the other decidedly defensive: the former will consist of multiplied attacks, made simultaneously or in succession, on the front, flank, and rear of an enemy's march throughout its whole extent. Such was the well-known affair of Lexington, in the war of the Revolution, in which 1800 of the British *élite* were so beaten, disheartened, and exhausted, that, had they not, at sunset, found armed vessels to protect, and an intrenched camp to receive them, not a man would have escaped capture or death. To this plan, however, serious objections may be made, arising from the subdivision of force and multitude of commanders it makes necessary. The second, or defensive plan, is entirely free from these or any other objections of importance, and is precisely what, were I in your place, I would do. Assemble my force in his front, fall quietly back to the Capitol, giving only that degree of resistance that invites a pursuit. When arrived in its front, I would immediately put in battery my twenty pieces of artillery, give the direction and management of these to Barney and Peter, fill the upper part of the house and the adjacent buildings with infantry, regulars and militia, amounting to 5000 men, while my 300 cavalry held themselves in reserve for a charge the moment a recoil appeared in the British columns of attack. On the success of this plan against the best-executed coup de main I would pledge both life and reputation, and earnestly recommend it to your adoption.' With this advice of the secretary, so obviously right of itself, and represented so clearly and conclusively, the general appeared to be pleased."

From this it appears that on the 19th, when the enemy's numbers and equipments were unknown, but considered very formidable, the secretary advised an advance against him, and small attacks, by night and by day, on his front and flanks; and on the 23d, when it was ascertained that he was without cannon or cavalry, and therefore more easily assailable, the secretary objected to multiplied attacks, on account of the subdivision of force and multitude of commanders which would be necessary, and was ready to stake his life and reputation upon a wholly different plan.

The plan advised by General Armstrong on the 19th was similar to the course which General Wilkinson says that he would have adopted. He was in Washington, under suspension, at the time of the arrival of the enemy in the Patuxent, and on receiving a note from Mr. Monroe in reference to the threatening aspect of affairs, he addressed him a letter, stating that if his arrest could be suspended, and his sword restored for a short period, he would take the command of the militia, and save the city or forfeit his life. He says:*

"This was an offer of dire responsibility at so late an hour; but I preferred death to inaction at such a crisis, and did believe that by covering the roads in front of the enemy with working-parties, to obstruct them by all practicable means, and at the same time falling on their rear by the new road to Zakiah Swamp, or that by St. Paul's Church, with Peter's artillery, Stull's, Davidson's, and Doughty's riflemen and infantry, and fifty dragoons, while simultaneous attacks were made on his front and left flank, at every exposed

* Wilkinson, vol. i., p. 761.

point and difficult defile, by flying parties of four or five hundred infantry, so stationed as to relieve each other as the enemy advanced—I repeat, it was then, and is still my opinion, that by such attacks, judiciously conducted and vigorously pushed, if the enemy had not retraced their steps, they would have crossed the Patuxent at Nottingham or Pig Point, and returned to their shipping; or, if they had persevered in their march against the capital, their boats might have been destroyed, and their retreat cut off, or rendered a scene of carnage. To have assured this issue, it was only necessary to post the Baltimore troops and the corps from Annapolis at some convenient point on the route between Queen Anne and the Governor's Bridge, with orders to push heavy parties of observation to the verge of the enemy's camp in Marlborough, and to hold themselves in readiness to harass their rear in whatever direction they might march. And here it may be proper to remark that the maxim, '*He who divides his force will be beaten in detail*,' must be received with qualification, as the art of war depends on an infinity of unforeseen contingencies, and therefore is not reducible to specific rules. It will apply to armies nearly on an equality, which are manœuvring for advantages, but never to an inferior force, which, though competent to harass its adversary, dare not hazard a general engagement. But President Madison preferred to signalize himself in a pitched battle, and, as he scorned the idea of taking any advantage of his antagonist, he permitted him an undisturbed march to the theatre of combat."

There is, no doubt, much force in General Wilkin-

son's remark, that "the art of war depends upon an infinity of unforeseen contingencies." It is easy to construct a theory of strategy or a body of military maxims, and, like Captain Bobadil in the play, invent ingenious and infallible plans for annihilating an enemy. The Baron Jomini, with whose works General Armstrong appears to have been much smitten, was the greatest of strategists in theory, yet the Emperor Napoleon, one of the greatest of practical strategists, had but a poor opinion of Jomini's, or any other theory of war, no doubt for the reason assigned by General Wilkinson. The Count de Segur* relates, that in the commencement of Napoleon's campaign in Russia, an envoy from the Czar presented himself at the French advanced posts with a flag of truce. In the course of conversation with him, Napoleon remarked, "You all believe yourselves to understand the art of war because you have read Jomini; but if his book could have taught you any thing, do you think that I would have allowed it to be published?"

There is no treatise on strategy which can provide for all the circumstances of a general's position, and no one has acknowledged this more fully and frankly than Jomini himself. There certainly is none which has imagined rules or maxims for a position so extraordinary as General Winder's. His situation, as General Wilkinson remarks, "was more than enough to have embarrassed an officer of forty campaigns, and it was his fortune to have served but two."

Nevertheless, the art of war has been reduced to certain fixed rules, and there is such a science as

* History of the Expedition to Russia, book iv., chap. v.

strategy, the principles of which are not to be despised because they are not infallible. And the plan of harassing the enemy recommended by General Armstrong and General Wilkinson, though it made detachments necessary, so far from being against the principles of the art of war, was in perfect conformity with them. Writers on the art of war recommend, and common sense dictates, that the weaker of two belligerents should, as a general rule, resort to a harassing guerrilla warfare rather than to pitched battles, more particularly against an invading enemy.*

But, admitting the correctness of this plan in the abstract, and admitting that General Winder had been permitted to adhere for a reasonable length of time to any plan of action, whether of his own or any one else's suggestion, he had not the means of pursuing the proposed course of hanging on the enemy's rear and flank, and harassing him by multiplied attacks. Neither his men nor their officers were fitted for it. Such a plan of war requires experienced troops, or, at

* This is the plan emphatically dictated by Lloyd, whom Jomini seems disposed to regard as the father of modern strategy; but he says that light troops are indispensable for the purpose. "*Il n'y a que de troupes légères qui puissent remplir cet objet ;*" and they must be well-trained light troops, not like some, of which he says, "*Elles manquaient entièrement d'activité, et n'avaient rien de léger que le nom.*" Probably he would not have considered either raw militia or sailors with 18-pounders as fulfilling the necessary condition.

General Rogniat says, "Les bons principes de la guerre défensive veulent qu'au lieu de s'opposer de front à une armée envahissante qui cherche à pénétrer dans l'interieur d'un pays, on se place sur ses flancs, etc."—*Considerations sur l'art de la guerre*, chap. iv.

The *petite guerre*, therefore, recommended by General Armstrong and General Wilkinson, appears to be in perfect conformity with theory.

least, men accustomed to the use of arms, to danger, and fatigue.

Militia troops have the same names as regular troops; they are called light infantry, light dragoons, light artillery, riflemen, grenadiers, etc.; but as a cowl does not make a monk, to dress and equip a body of men as light infantry or dragoons does not make them what they are called. They must be disciplined, and have some experience in the peculiar duties, before they are entitled to the name. A company of cavalry, formed in the heart of a large commercial city, might choose to assume the name of "Cossacks," and provide themselves with lances and other suitable equipments, but they would remain, in reality, just what they were before, a parcel of inoffensive clerks or journeymen mechanics.

The militia troops under General Winder were mostly without any training or discipline whatever—men drafted from peaceable walks of life, in a peaceable section of country, habituated to comforts and conveniences, to regular hours and good living, instead of being inured to danger or privation. They were unaccustomed to subordination, and disposed to treat their commanding officers as associates and equals. Whatever their capacities might have been, there was no time to draw them out; and whatever the qualifications of their officers, they were, with but few exceptions, wholly unknown to the commanding general, who was therefore unable to designate, for the performance of any particular duty, those who might have been capable of performing it. He could not be sure that any order would be promptly executed or any

duty properly performed. To attempt strategic movements with such troops, or—with a "multitude of commanders" no better skilled in military matters than their men—to make "multiplied attacks" on the "front, flanks, and rear" of the enemy, was a waste of time, at least, and time in war is a jewel of inestimable value. Experience, in our own and other countries, seems to have demonstrated that the only reliable mode of fighting such troops is behind defensive works or a strong natural position, where they will not be required to execute manœuvres, and will have as little as possible to apprehend from the manœuvres of the enemy.

Militia, or newly levied and undisciplined troops, have been so little used in the wars of Europe, that military maxims or rules of strategy borrowed from that quarter of the world require some alteration to be adapted to our country. In the early wars of the French Revolution necessity compelled a resort to new levies, and the results were occasionally somewhat astounding to the generals who had the fortune to command them. During the retreat of General Dumourier from the Argonne Forest in 1792, his rear guard, consisting of ten thousand men, was attacked by fifteen hundred Prussian hussars and four pieces of light artillery. The French troops instantly took to flight, disbanded themselves, and many of them did not stop until they reached Paris. Dumourier, finding that so little reliance was to be placed on his undisciplined levies when performing manœuvres in the presence of trained and experienced troops, resolved to make the war one of positions, and inspire his troops

with confidence by placing them behind intrenchments.*

There is no doubt that the feeling of contempt habitually entertained by officers of the "regular army" for militia may be carried too far. The test of genius and capacity is to achieve great results with apparently inadequate means; and as a good workman, if compelled to operate, will not stop to quarrel with his tools, but proceed at once to make the best use of them, so a good general will make the best use he can of indifferent troops, if he can not get better. Human nature is pretty much the same whether in or out of a military garb, and is plastic in the hands of those who know how to mould it, who are born with a talent for command, and who can inspire confidence and infuse their own spirit into their followers. The troops with which Napoleon gained his first victories, over the most skillful generals and best-disciplined armies, were composed of the same materials as those who were attacked with panic under Dumourier. The history of our own country is enriched with the exploits of militia, from the battle of Bunker's Hill to that of New Orleans.

Confidence of troops in their leader appears to be the main element of victory. But how was it possible for General Winder's troops, having little or no personal knowledge of him, to feel this confidence, when they found that those who knew him best, the leading men of the nation, were unwilling to trust to his capacity; kept him in a state of supervision and pupilage from the outset; instructed, advised, and

* Alison's History of Europe, vol. i., chap. viii.

urged him to do this and to do that, and, finally, without consulting him, posted his troops for him on the day of battle?

As a specimen of this want of confidence in General Winder, or of respect for his authority as commanding general, exhibited by some of the highest officers under his command, and to show how little he could expect to succeed in operations, not under his immediate supervision, which required a "subdivision of force and multitude of commanders," we shall anticipate our narrative by adverting to the conduct of General Stansbury on the morning of the battle, as frankly stated by himself in his letter to the chairman of the committee of investigation. Early on that morning, being then in Bladensburg, he received an order from General Winder, directing him. if the enemy should move against him, to resist as long as possible. Instead of making up his mind at once to obey the order, or at least make an attempt to obey, he "instantly," as he says, held a council of war, consisting of Colonels Ragan, Schutz, and Sterett, and Major Pinkney, submitted the order to them, and by their unanimous advice retreated from Bladensburg toward Washington, in order to "take a position" which he could defend. While looking for this position, which he would probably have had some difficulty in finding, he again received an order by an express from General Winder, directing him, if the enemy should attempt a passage by the way of Bladensburg, to oppose him as long as he could. Upon the receipt of this reiterated order, he again summoned his council of war, and by their advice again refused obedience, as "no good could result

therefrom;" and it was not until the receipt of a third order that he could be induced to retrace his steps to Bladensburg. General Winder, in his narrative, speaks of the mortification which he felt on learning of this proceeding of Stansbury, and leniently attributes it to "misunderstanding or some other cause." General Wilkinson, in adverting to the affair, intimates that it must have been the result of an order from a high quarter, given to General Stansbury without the knowledge of General Winder, and he says "the fact may be fairly presumed, because, if General Stansbury had deserted his post under such circumstances, he surely would have been arrested."*

This incident in itself, occurring at the eleventh hour, was enough wholly to disconcert and frustrate the plans of any general who had a plan. Bladensburg was the most defensible position that General Stansbury could have found, if that was all that he was in search of, and a stand there might have altered the whole fortunes of the day by checking the advance of the enemy, and giving time to bring up and post the main body of the army.†

* Vol. i., p. 777.

† The British took it for granted that Bladensburg was occupied; and the reasons why it should have been, as General Winder appears to have intended it to be, are clearly stated by one of their writers, the author of "*A Subaltern in America*," whose work was republished in the Port Folio in September and October, 1827. He says:

"It is a place of inconsiderable size, not capable, I should conceive, of containing more than 1000 or 1500 inhabitants; but the houses are, for the most part, composed of brick, and there is a mound on the right of the entrance very well adapted to hold a light field-piece or two for the purpose of sweeping the road. Under these circumstances, we naturally concluded that an American force must be

Frederick the Great, in his military instructions to his generals, quotes and endorses a saying of Prince Eugene, that a general who wishes to avoid a battle need only call a council of war. This uniformity of precedent may have excused General Stansbury's council of war, but the idea of holding such a council to debate the expediency of obeying a reiterated order of the commander-in-chief could have occurred to a militia general only. The night preceding, General Stansbury had been urged by Colonel Monroe "to fall forthwith on the enemy's rear,"* and had excused himself by saying that he had been ordered to take post at Bladensburg, and did not think himself at liberty to leave it. It seems strange that a few hours should have wrought such a change in his notions of duty and subordination. And what gives the more color to General Wilkinson's supposition that General Stansbury, in this direct breach of orders, committed with perfect impunity, had the sanction of high authority, is the fact that the President had, the night before, passed through Bladensburg on his return to Washington from the Old Fields.† Now it is very possible, as the President appears to have been alarmed at the divided position of the army, and anxious to concentrate it,

here. Though out of the regular line, it was not so far advanced but that it might have been maintained, if not to the last, at all events for many hours, while the means of retreat, so soon as the garrison should be fairly overpowered, were direct and easy. Our surprise, therefore, was not less palpable than our satisfaction, when, on reaching the town, we found that it was empty."

* This is mentioned by Mr. Monroe in his statement to the committee, but not by General Stansbury.

† See Mr. Rush's Statement, close of chap. xiv.

and as General Armstrong had that morning suggested, in his presence, to General Winder, the plan of making the Capitol the point of defence, the President may have taken an opportunity to intimate to General Stansbury the expediency of drawing nearer to Washington, without actually directing him to do so.

CHAPTER IX.

Results of the Reconnoitring Expedition under Mr. Monroe.—Advance of the Enemy from Benedict.—General Winder marches to meet him, and retreats to the City.

THE reconnoitring expedition of Mr. Monroe to Benedict, under the escort of a body of twenty-five or thirty dragoons, resulted in no useful or reliable information as to the enemy's numbers or objects, although he arrived, as he states, at 10 o'clock on the morning of the 20th of August, "in sight of the enemy's squadron lying before Benedict, and continued to be a spectator of their movements until after the action at Bladensburg on the 24th."

In fact, Mr. Monroe could hardly have advanced far on his way to Benedict when the idea must have struck him with considerable force that it would be imprudent in him to give the enemy a chance of boasting that they had made the American Secretary of State a prisoner. This consideration ought to have prevented him from engaging at all in the first reconnoitring party, which was the most important, and from which the others probably took their hue. It should have been intrusted to some active, enterprising, and intelligent subordinate officer, to whom the commanding general could have given his orders and instructions freely, who would have felt pride in returning with prompt and useful intelligence, and some chagrin in returning without any. The only definite

intelligence which Mr. Monroe appears to have communicated was contained in a brief and apparently hurried dispatch to the President, the exact date of which does not appear, but which General Armstrong says was transmitted to him by the President during the night of the 23d. It is in the following words:

"The enemy are advanced six miles on the road to the Wood Yard, and our troops are retiring. Our troops were on the march to meet them, but in too small a body to engage. General Winder proposes to retire till he can collect them in a body. The enemy are in full march for Washington. Have the materials prepared to destroy the bridges.

"J. MONROE.

"You had better remove the records."

The tone of this dispatch was certainly well calculated to create a panic—to raise the hair on the heads of all to whom its awful import was whispered—as much so as if it had been briefly conveyed in the four words, "Run for your lives!"

The only individuals who appear to have formed a sober and judicious estimate of the number of the enemy were the revolutionary veteran Colonel Beall, whom we have already mentioned, and Dr. Hanson Catlett, a surgeon of the regular army, who was attached to General Winder's suite as staff surgeon. Colonel Beall had an early opportunity of observing the enemy's column in march, and estimated their number at 4000, which the event verified.* Dr. Catlett

* Dr. Catlett, in his statement to the committee, says that he "had a better opportunity of observation after the battle than any

says, in his statement, that when he returned to Washington on the evening of the 23d of August, he found that "the enemy were pertinaciously represented to be at least 9000, and many were supposed to believe their number greater;" but that he had examined, with all the address he could, several prisoners who had been taken by our cavalry, and they "could only enumerate four regiments, and name but one general and one colonel acting as brigadier;" and the doctor states that he would have risked his life upon the enemy's "almost entire want of artillery and want of cavalry." The opinion of Colonel Beall ought to have had some weight, on account of his military experience; that of the doctor, founded on information obtained from ignorant or frightened prisoners, was naturally little regarded, and, at all events, did not act as an anodyne.

other of our officers," and from his own observation, "corroborated in the aggregate by the best information" he "could get from the surgeons, sergeants, and men left in hospital," he estimates the whole number of the British at 3540.

The following statement of the British force landed was published in Niles's Register, vol. vii., p. 14:

21st Regiment			.....	1003 men.
4th	do.	1st battalion	.....	800 "
44th	do.	do.	.....	630 "
85th	do.	do.	.....	750 "
Artillerists			.....	90 "
Marines under Admiral Cockburn			.....	1500 "
Seamen	do.	do.	.....	350 "
				5123 men.

A portion of the force was left at Marlborough, and probably elsewhere.

Gleig, the author of the Campaign at Washington, states the number at 4500; the Subaltern in America says 4000.

In a statement* attributed to Major Thomas L. McKenney, afterward Superintendent of Indian Affairs, who is referred to in General Winder's narrative as a volunteer aid to General Smith, it is said that on the night preceding the battle the intelligence received "went to confirm the belief that the enemy were 10,000 strong." The writer refers to "the most *unparalleled* dearth of correct information which existed," and to its effects upon General Winder's movements, and says:

"With the troops myself from the commencement of their march from Washington, from the nature of my office a good deal with General Winder, I consider myself as having possessed opportunities of judging of the quantity of praise or blame that should justly attach to him at least equal to those of any other officer not attached to his military family.

"If an assurance of unremitted zeal and activity will rescue him from any portion of blame, he possessed them to an extreme. If a constant use of the means he commanded to obtain correct information of the position, and numbers, and movements of the enemy will rescue him, then is he blameless. He used them; but they were either too timid to approach the enemy's lines, too indifferent, or both these together, to furnish him with the information wanted. He depended upon them, as he could not help doing, though their reports were often contradictory. If a manifestly deep interest, night watching, and great personal activity and labor will restore whatever good opinions

* We find this statement in the Portico, a periodical magazine published at Baltimore in 1816, vol. v., p. 367.

he may have lost, then ought he to be reinstated in those good opinions. That his orders were given and recalled with a suddenness that would sometimes surprise his troops, is certain, but they were founded upon the information he received from his vedettes. In fine, his misfortune is attributable more to the description of his command, its general rawness and unfitness for such a fight as he saw awaited him from tried and veteran troops, than from any defect in his abilities as a general. He was hurried in among his troops, and his troops in upon him, at the eleventh hour. He saw his forces, and he saw their quality. Their numbers not half equal to those he was destined to oppose; for such was his information, and under this belief he acted."

At 5 o'clock in the afternoon of the 23d of August, according to General Winder's narrative, the enemy's force "was very imperfectly known, the opinions and representations varying from four to twelve thousand;" and nothing occurred between that time and the battle to throw any additional light upon the subject.

This extraordinary dearth of information, and the utter barrenness of the numerous reconnoissances, continued for more than three days, would be incredible but for the indisputable and cumulative evidence of the fact; and it is the more astonishing, because the enemy, from the first, gave no indications of having either artillery or cavalry, and therefore the vedettes could have ventured nearer to him. It was most unfortunate that correct information could not be, or was not obtained, as it would have prevented the depressing effects which the exaggerated accounts must have

had upon the spirits of the men. A knowledge of the enemy's real strength, a reduction of one half its supposed number, would have been as inspiriting in its effects as a re-enforcement on our side to the same extent. General Stansbury might have been willing to await at Bladensburg the approach of four thousand men, though he naturally hesitated to oppose an army of eight or ten thousand disciplined troops with a body of two thousand inexperienced, fatigued, and dispirited militia-men.

The absence of such important information is a sufficient proof that the enemy, in his progress, was not only not harassed or molested, but not watched, and therefore we must depend pretty much on their own reports for an account of their movements.

According to the dispatches of Ross and Cockburn to their government,* the army landed at Benedict on the 19th of August without opposition, and on the next day commenced its march toward Nottingham, a small town on the Patuxent, about fifteen miles north of Benedict. On the 21st, at noon, the army had proceeded no farther than Lower Marlborough, nearly midway between Benedict and Nottingham, where it halted for some hours, and where Cockburn, who had kept his boats and tenders as nearly as possible abreast of the army, anchored for the purpose of communicating with Ross. The army then resumed its march to Nottingham, and Cockburn proceeded on to the same place with the boats. "On approaching that town," says Cockburn, "a few shots were exchanged between

* These dispatches will be found in Niles's Register, vol. vii., and also in the Appendix to vol. i. of Wilkinson's Memoirs.

the leading boats and some of the enemy's cavalry, but the appearance of our army caused them to retire with precipitation."

During the night of the 21st the enemy remained at Nottingham, and the boats and tenders were anchored off it; and the next day, soon after daybreak, the whole moved forward again.

So far the invaders were certainly proceeding very leisurely. In three days they had advanced not more than fifteen miles from the place of debarkation, had rested quietly each night, and had time to amuse themselves during the day by plundering the country bordering on their line of march, and to regale themselves on the summer fruits and melons.

On leaving Nottingham, the enemy's land and naval forces no longer continued to move parallel with each other. Cockburn, with his boats, proceeded up the river in search of Barney's flotilla, which was then lying near Mount Pleasant, about nine miles from Nottingham. On his way he landed some marines at Pig Point, where they found a large quantity of tobacco, which they afterward carried off. On nearing the flotilla, he says, the sloop bearing Commodore Barney's broad pennant was found to be on fire, and soon afterward blew up. "I now saw clearly," he continues, "that they were all abandoned and on fire, with trains to their magazines; and out of the seventeen vessels which composed this formidable flotilla, sixteen were in quick succession blown to atoms, and the seventeenth (in which the fire had not taken) we captured." The flotilla had in fact been abandoned the day before (the 21st) by Commodore Barney, under orders from

the Secretary of the Navy, a few men being left in each barge to destroy them on the appearance of the enemy in force, while the commodore proceeded with the main body of his men to join the army under General Winder.

In the mean time, Ross, on leaving Nottingham, had taken what is called the Chapel Road to Upper Marlborough. This road diverges from the river, and, at a few miles distance from Nottingham, forks, one branch running northward to Marlborough, and the other westward to Washington. At this fork or junction, a movement or manœuvre took place on Ross's part, which appears to have been a source of great embarrassment to General Winder, whose proceedings, during Ross's march from Benedict, we shall now take a view of.

It has been seen that, according to General Armstrong's statement, on the day that advice was received in Washington that the enemy was ascending the Patuxent, General Winder was instructed "to take a position near the enemy," and "on the 22d he was advised to hang on their rear and flank a heavy corps, while he opposed to them another in their front." On the 19th of August, according to M'Clane's statement, published by Armstrong, the latter advised General Winder to "*assemble as large a force*" as possible, and "place it speedily at Nottingham, or other point on the Patuxent."

In order to appreciate the tendency of the course thus advised or commanded, it will be necessary to recur to the leading principles of the art of war. One of the fundamental maxims of the art is the proverbial

precept, "Divide and conquer"—*Divide et impera*—a maxim which applies in other matters as well as in war, and is older than any theory of strategy. The talent of a great captain, said Frederick, consists in inducing the enemy to divide his forces. Another military maxim, the crowning principle of all theories of strategy, is, that the object of all strategic movements or manœuvres should be "to operate a combined effort with the greatest possible mass of force upon the decisive p int."

"What is war?" cried Napoleon. "A trade of barbarians, the whole art of which consists in being the strongest on a given point!"*

It must also be borne in mind that there are two kinds of war: the one a war of sieges and pitched battles, the other a sort of guerrilla warfare, or war of skirmishes and "small attacks." The latter is the resort chiefly of a belligerent who is too weak to encounter his enemy in a pitched battle. It requires a particular kind of troops, hardy, active, and enterprising; a subdivision of forces, and "a multitude of commanders," who must be qualified each to advise himself, to judge of the advantages of time and position, and be prompt and skilful in availing themselves of them. It is, of course, the kind of war least adapted to newly levied, undisciplined troops, and inexperienced commanders, habituated only to the routine and comforts of a peaceful life.

All the movements of the government prior to the campaign show that they had it in contemplation to meet the enemy at some time and place in a pitched

* The Count de Segur's Campaign in Russia, book vii., chap. viii.

battle. General Armstrong himself, in his statement of the opinions which he says that he submitted to the cabinet on the 1st of July, refers to a "main battle" as a matter of course. The troops which were assembling in different quarters were, sooner or later, to be drawn together and concentrated at some point, though that point was yet undetermined. No one dreamed that the chief reliance, if indeed any reliance, was to be placed on a guerrilla warfare, for which the troops were wholly unfitted.

General Winder, therefore, if left to himself, would probably have been governed by the leading principles of strategy which we have cited. He would have endeavored, particularly as his force was at least of very doubtful adequacy, both in numbers and character, to keep his own army united, and, if possible, to divide that of the enemy, so that he might have a chance of meeting him at some point with an overpowering force.

The course which General Armstrong instructed him to pursue was just the opposite of this, and was, in fact, playing into the hands of the enemy. If Ross, after landing at Benedict, had been informed that a large force was preparing to meet him, but that it was as yet divided, one moiety of it being at Washington, and the other at Baltimore or its vicinity, his proper course would have been to hurry his movements for the purpose of encountering and overwhelming one or the other moiety before they could effect a junction. General Armstrong's plan would have saved Ross the trouble of hurrying himself. It would have dispatched one half of General Winder's army by a forced march to Nottingham, to encounter an enemy actually more

than twice as strong in numbers alone, leaving discipline and experience out of the question, but which was supposed to be four or five times as numerous. The result must necessarily have been a complete defeat or a hasty retreat, which, in its ultimate consequences, would be as bad as a defeat.

The event in this case was, as will be seen, a striking exemplification of the truth of the great strategic maxim, and of the folly of attempting to apply other strategic rules, equally sound when well applied, to a case which did not admit of their application. The large body of troops which General Winder was directed to dispatch to Nottingham was not a body of light troops, or a partisan corps, which could act independently of a main army and as auxiliary to it, but it was nearly half of the army upon which he was to rely for the defence of the capital. The consequence was, that when, after much trouble and fatigue, it had been brought within striking distance of the enemy, common sense dictated the necessity of a retreat.

It was most unfortunate that General Winder should have been persuaded or compelled even to attempt a compliance with the policy dictated to him by General Armstrong. But had he been inclined to pursue a different course, it is probable that he would not have been permitted to adhere to it. The mass of mankind are not disposed to tolerate a Fabian policy or "masterly inactivity," and very naturally, because it is much more likely to be the result of sluggishness or timidity than of sagacious foresight and calculation. They love and admire promptness, energy, and determination. The vicinity of danger, too, occasions a kind of excite-

ment which almost irresistibly impels men to run into it if they can not run away from it, and to do any thing but calmly await its approach. Even the great Napoleon, who enjoyed so fully the enthusiastic confidence of his followers, excited distrust and clamor among his oldest generals when, at Borodino, he paused in the midst of victory to consider consequences, and expressed a desire to "see a little further on the chessboard before he hazarded a move."* And it is a well-known fact that Captain Hull, during the engagement between the Constitution and Guerriere, had some difficulty in repressing an almost mutinous spirit of discontent among his officers and crew because he chose to reserve his fire, while the enemy was pouring broadside after broadside into his vessel.

Had General Winder manifested a disinclination to march in pursuit of the enemy, he probably would have been compelled by popular clamor to resign his command, as General Armstrong was afterward compelled, by just indignation against his culpable inactivity, to resign his secretaryship. No one censured General Winder's advance against the enemy, which was unnecessary, and pregnant with disastrous consequences, but all were disposed to censure his retreat, which was unavoidable.

It will be unnecessary to take more than a cursory review of this advance and retreat to show how barren they were of any useful or interesting result, and of how little importance a more detailed narrative of them would be.

The brigade of District militia under General Smith

* The Count de Segur.

left the Capitol in the afternoon of the 20th of August, taking the road for Nottingham, and halted for the night about four miles from the Eastern Branch. "They were here," says General Smith, "overtaken by their baggage, when it was ascertained there was a great deficiency of necessary camp equipage, the public stores being exhausted; many of the troops were compelled to lie out in the open field; and of the essential article of flints, upon a requisition of one thousand, only two hundred could be had. Means were immediately adopted to supply the latter defect from private resources; the former was never accomplished." The next day, Sunday, "after a hot and fatiguing march," they arrived and encamped at the Wood Yard, about fifteen miles from Washington and twelve from Nottingham, where they found the regulars under Lieutenant-colonel William Scott, and other troops, assembled, in all about fifteen hundred men.

General Winder also, on the 20th, dispatched Lieutenant-colonel Tilghman with his squadron of dragoons, by the way of the Wood Yard, "to fall down upon the enemy, to annoy, harass, and impede their march by every possible means," and gain intelligence, and another troop of volunteer cavalry, from the City of Washington, was sent for the same purpose toward Benedict by the way of Piscataway, it being uncertain which way the enemy would take if he intended to advance upon Washington.

On Sunday, the 21st, General Winder joined the force at the Wood Yard, and the next day, about sunrise, he ordered Lieutenant-colonel Scott's command, Laval's cavalry, Major Peter's artillery, and Stull and

Davidson's companies, in all about 800 of the best troops at his disposal, to proceed immediately to Nottingham to meet the enemy, the rest of the force being directed to follow and support them. General Winder himself proceeded in advance of the first body, accompanied by his staff and by Colonel Monroe, and upon arriving within half a mile of the place where, as we have said, the road from Nottingham forks, they received intelligence that the enemy was moving in force toward the junction. They continued on for the purpose of gaining an observation until they came within view of the enemy's advance, or within three or four hundred yards of it.* At this time the detachment under Scott and Peter was about two miles distant from the junction, and it being considered impossible for them to reach it before the enemy, General Winder dispatched orders to them to retire, post themselves in the most advantageous position they could find, and wait for him. In the mean time, the troops under General Smith had arrived within two miles of the advance, and the whole American force, then within four or five miles of the enemy, consisted, including Barney's seamen and the marines from the Washington navy-yard, with five pieces of heavy artillery, of about 2500 men.

Ross, on arriving at the junction, turned into the road to the Wood Yard as if to advance upon our troops, and proceeded some distance upon it; and it must have been at this time that Mr. Monroe addressed the hurried dispatch to the President, advising him that the enemy was in full march for Washington, and

* Dr. Catlett's statement.

General Winder retiring before him. But Ross, after halting an hour or more on the road to the Wood Yard, altered the direction of his column, and turned into the road to Marlborough, thus renewing General Winder's uncertainty as to his purposes. In consequence, an order was given for the whole force to retire, on the same road by which they had advanced, to a place called the Long or Battalion Old Fields, about eight miles from Washington.

This movement in advance, therefore, resulted in nothing but the fatigue and discouragement of the troops. It was judicious in General Winder to avoid an engagement, because his force was wholly insufficient. But that was known before the movement began; and if it was wise to retire, it certainly was unwise to have advanced. In reference to this retrograde movement General Wilkinson says:

"This was the first occasion which presented for a collision of arms, and General Winder was present with the American troops; but, if a fault was then committed, he should not be held responsible, because he was attended by a minister of the cabinet [Mr. Monroe], an older soldier, by whose advice he was doubtless influenced; nor is he to be blamed for falling back on the approach of the enemy, because it was not his policy to indulge the British commander in a general action which he sought; indeed, that was the last great error of President Madison. But General Winder should, in my judgment, have ordered his main body, then commanded by General Smith, of the District of Columbia, which was under arms near the Wood Yard ready for combat, to have gained the

heights on the left of Charles's Creek, and, as soon as the enemy had resumed their march and passed Oden's, he should have followed them, and fallen on their rear at the time General Smith engaged their front, or when their centre had passed the Creek; but the enemy gave him a more favorable opportunity by turning to their right soon after they had passed Bishop Claggett's, in order to communicate with the flotilla at Mount Calvert, on a road so flanked by hills and ravines that, by a vigorous attack, their rear might have been broken and cut up before they could have made front to support it. Pent up in such narrow, difficult grounds, and pressed in front and rear, the effect of General Ross's discipline and numbers would have been impaired, and he must have been crippled before he could have extricated himself, while the American corps, with the country open behind them, could have withdrawn at discretion, and, although the enemy might have gained Upper Marlborough, it would have terminated their advance. This is speculation, but, whatever may be its merits, I know the corps of Scott and Peter panted for action, and they should have been indulged; in such circumstances, blood judiciously expended excites emulation and inspires courage.

"But General Winder fell back on his main body near the Wood Yard, from whence he retired to encamp at the Long Old Fields, and, like all retrograde movements in the face of an enemy, this disheartened his men and officers."

In indulging in these speculations, General Wilkinson does not seem to have recollected the anecdote with which, in another part of his book, he satirizes a

speculation of Secretary Armstrong "in his cabinet at a thousand miles' distance." "I think," said the minister to Eugene, "you might have crossed the river at this point," tracing the route on a map with his finger. "Yes, my lord, if your finger had been a bridge."

If General Winder could have known that the enemy would turn to the right after passing Bishop Claggett's, and that he would then be certain to catch them in a defile where they could be "pressed in front and rear," and crippled, not to say cut to pieces, before they could extricate themselves, it would have been inexcusable in him not to avail himself of the opportunity. But if, as General Wilkinson admits, it was not General Winder's policy to indulge the British commander in a general action, it was not his policy to run the risk of being forced into a general action by following the enemy, and still less his policy to divide the small force under his command, in the vain hope of being able to make a successful simultaneous attack on the enemy's front and rear.

It is very true that an enemy on his march may be greatly harassed and crippled by smaller numbers. But this can be safely attempted only when the smaller numbers are suitable for the purpose, can be spared, and are not needed for ulterior operations. If General Winder had known the numbers and equipment of the enemy, and been furnished, instead of volunteer city riflemen, armed with muskets, with three hundred Western riflemen, accustomed to bush-fighting, as many well-trained and experienced dragoons, and Peter's artillery, these alone might have enabled him, in such a

country, to drive the British back to their shipping at Benedict. There would probably have been no need of any other army. But he no more had these means than Prince Eugene had the bridge at the spot pointed out by the minister.

Still, it does not appear that, on this occasion, General Winder was determined to avoid a collision, or that he retreated from a pursuing enemy. It was necessary, in order to give his troops any chance of making a successful stand, that they should retire to a suitable position, and they were not ordered to abandon that position, and fall back still farther, until it was ascertained that the enemy was not advancing toward them, but had taken the road to Marlborough.

Ross arrived at Marlborough about two o'clock in the afternoon of the 22d, and remained there until the same hour the next day, having, of course, abundant time to rest and refresh his troops, and being perfectly unmolested. They employed themselves in securing and sending off tobacco and other plunder. On the morning of the 23d Cockburn crossed from Pig Point to Marlborough, to meet and confer with Ross as to farther operations, and they were not long, he says, in agreeing on the propriety of making an immediate attempt on Washington. The marines, marine artillery, and seamen were brought over from Pig Point, and it was arranged that the marines should remain and keep possession of Marlborough, while the marine artillery and seamen accompanied the army.

General Winder, who had been actively employed with the cavalry, near Marlborough, in observation of the enemy, retired, late in the afternoon of the 22d, to

the Long Old Fields, where his troops were encamped. Soon after his arrival, he was informed that the President and heads of departments had arrived at a house about a mile in the rear of the camp, and he detached a captain's guard to their quarters, but was himself too much overwhelmed with business to wait upon the President until next morning. He says:

"After having waded through the infinite applications, consultations, and calls necessarily arising from a body of 2500 men, not three days from their homes, without organization, or any practical knowledge of service on the part of their officers, and being obliged to listen to the officious but well-intended information and advice of the crowd, who, at such a time, would be full of both, I lay down to snatch a moment of rest."

General Wilkinson quotes from an unnamed officer, who passed the night of the 22d at the Old Fields, the following account of the camp:

"The camp was as open all night as a race-field, and the sailors and militia were as noisy as if at a fair; you might hear the countersign fifty yards when a sentry challenged. I made up my mind that if Ross, whose camp I had reconnoitred in the evening, was a man of enterprise, he would be upon us in the course of the night, and, being determined to die like a trooper's horse, I slept with my shoes on."

The desperate frame of mind which would induce a man to sleep with his shoes on is not favorable to cool reflection; but even General Wilkinson, writing coolly in his closet, after referring to the "extraordinary *mélange*" encamped at the Old Fields, says that, "with this disorganized body, General Winder rashly kept

his position during the night, within eight miles of 4000 or 5000 veteran troops, who ought to have marched upon and routed him." Yet General Wilkinson would have had General Winder attack the same body of veteran troops with little more than half the number of men which he had at the Old Fields. General Winder, it seems, was not adventurous enough in the morning, and too rash at night, and *vice versa* with General Ross. A military critic is the hardest of all critics to satisfy. Perhaps General Winder, with patrols out in every direction, and the enemy with none, entertained no serious apprehensions of a night attack from troops eight miles distant.

To add to the fatigue and discouragement of the army at the Old Fields, the troops were roused about 2 o'clock in the morning of the 23d by a false alarm from a sentinel, were formed in order of battle, and when dismissed, were ordered to hold themselves ready for their posts at a moment's warning. This was the second successive night that they had been needlessly deprived of their rest. Shortly after daybreak orders were given to strike the tents, load the baggage-wagons, and have all in readiness to move in the course of an hour. The troops were then got under arms, and were reviewed by the President and suite.

At 9 o'clock A. M., it being ascertained that the enemy was still stationary, and gave no indications of a move in any direction from Marlborough, General Winder formed the resolution to concentrate near Marlborough all the troops within his reach. He therefore sent orders to General Stansbury, who, as we have seen, had arrived at Bladensburg the night before, to march

his brigade, together with the troops under Lieutenant-colonel Sterett, if they had joined him, slowly toward Marlborough, and take a position in the road at a point seven miles from that place and four from the Old Fields. The same direction was to be given to the troops arriving from Annapolis under Lieutenant-colonel Beall, so soon as he could be communicated with. A detachment from General Smith's brigade, under Major Peter, composed of the same companies as the detachment of the preceding day, was ordered to move in the direction of Marlborough, reconnoitre the enemy, approach him as near as possible without running too much risk, and annoy him whether he should be stationary or in motion.

General Winder himself, about noon, with a troop of Laval's cavalry, proceeded toward Bladensburg for the purpose of having an interview with Stansbury, but when within four or five miles from that place, which is about ten miles from the Old Fields, was overtaken by Major McKenney, with intelligence that Major Peter had skirmished with the enemy, who had driven him back, and was then halted within three miles of the Old Fields; that General Smith had, agreeably to orders, sent off the baggage across the Eastern Branch, and his troops, together with Commodore Barney's men, were drawn up ready to receive the enemy, should he make an attack.

Upon receiving this intelligence, General Winder sent orders to General Stansbury to fall back, take the best position he could with Sterett in front of Bladensburg, resist as long as possible if attacked, and, if driven from his position, to retreat toward the city.

He then retraced his steps to the Old Fields, which he reached about 5 P.M., and, as he says, found Smith and Barney judiciously posted, awaiting the enemy. They continued in this position till near sundown, when it was determined to retire across the Eastern Branch Bridge. The reasons for this move are thus stated by General Winder:

"My reason for not remaining at the Old Fields during the night was, that, if an attack should be made in the night, our own superiority, which lay in artillery, was lost, and the inexperience of the troops would subject them to certain, infallible, and irremediable disorder, and probably destruction, and thereby occasion the loss of a full half of the force which I could hope to oppose, under more favorable circumstances, to the enemy.

"The reasons for retiring by the Eastern Branch bridge were the absolute security it gave to that pass, the greater facility of joining General Young and aiding in the protection of Fort Washington, the greater facility of pursuing the enemy should he recede and proceed to Annapolis, and the certainty that I could draw General Stansbury and Lieutenant-colonel Sterett to me if the enemy advanced too rapidly for me to advance, and unite to support them."

It appears that this retrograde movement, however judiciously resolved on, was somewhat precipitately executed. Mr. John Law, a respectable citizen of Washington, says, in his statement to the committee,

"Although our march in the retreat was extremely rapid, yet orders were occasionally given to the captains of companies to hurry on their men. The march,

therefore, literally became a run of eight miles; and the propriety of this rapid movement, which unnecessarily fatigued and dispirited the men, may be tested by the fact that the main body of the enemy *bivouacked* that night on the Melwood estate, more than three miles distant from the ground we had left."

General Smith says that the troops, "much wearied and exhausted, encamped late at night" within the city, and continues:

"Thus terminated the four days of service of the troops of this District preceding the affair at Bladensburg. They had been under arms, with but little intermission, the whole of the time, both night and day; had traveled, during their different marches in advance and retreat, a considerable tract of country, exposed to the burning heat of a sultry sun by day, and many of them to the cold dews of the night, uncovered. They had, in this period, drawn but two rations, the requisition therefor, in the first instance, being but partially complied with, and it being afterward almost impossible to procure the means of transportation, the wagons employed by our quarter-master for that purpose being constantly impressed by the government agents for the purpose of removing the public records, when the enemy's approach was known, and some of them thus seized while proceeding to take in provisions for the army.

"Those hardships and privations could not but be severely distressing to men, the greater part of whom possessed and enjoyed at home the means of comfortable living, and from their usual habits and pursuits in life but ill qualified to endure them. They, how-

ever, submitted without murmuring, evincing by their patience, their zeal, and the promptitude with which they obeyed every order, a magnanimity highly honorable to their character. Great as was their merit in this respect, it was no less so in the spirit manifested whenever an order was given to march to meet the foe; and at the 'Long Old Fields,' where his attack was momently expected in overwhelming force, they displayed, in presence of many spectators, although scarce any of them had ever been in action, a firmness, a resolution, and an intrepidity which, whatever might have been the result, did honor to their country."

The troops under General Stansbury, at Bladensburg, on the night of the 23d and morning of the 24th, were in no better condition than those who had retired from the Old Fields. Stansbury represents them as "worn down with hunger and fatigue." They were under arms the whole night, with the exception of about an hour, their only provision salt beef of an inferior quality, and old and musty flour, and no time to cook that.

Laval* represents his cavalry as having been on constant duty, in reconnoitring, patrolling, and escorting, from the afternoon of the 21st until 11 at night of the 23d, when they reached the Eastern Branch Bridge, "both men and horses hungry and harassed with fatigue," and remained in that condition until 10 o'clock the next morning. They then succeeded in procuring a stack of hay, and the men were in the act of fetching it on their heads to feed their famished horses,

* Statement to the committee.

when the trumpet sounded, and they were compelled to drop it and mount, a number of the horses being unable to proceed.

Such was the sorry *finale* of the strategic movements of the four days preceding the battle of Bladensburg, the useful results being about the same as those of the exploit of the King of France, who,

> "with twenty thousand men,
> Marched up a hill, and then marched down again."

The British writers, in their account of this campaign, enormously exaggerate the difficulties and dangers which they encountered, in order, of course, to enhance the glory of their achievement. But, up to the moment of the battle, they specify no dangers or difficulties, and, as we have seen, they could have encountered none. They complain of the exhausting effects of the intense heat upon men who had been enervated by long confinement on shipboard. There was, no doubt, some truth in this; but, on the other hand, the release from such confinement tended to refresh and strengthen them, notwithstanding temporary suffering, and it is so stated by one of their writers.* He says that, to the army, "the prospect of a few days' sojourn upon their own element was in the highest degree animating and delightful," and he represents the men, after landing at Benedict, some "lying at full length upon the grass, basking in the beams of a sultry sun, and apparently made happy by the very feeling of the green sod under them. Others were running and leaping about, giving exercise to the limbs which had so long been cramped and confined on board ship."

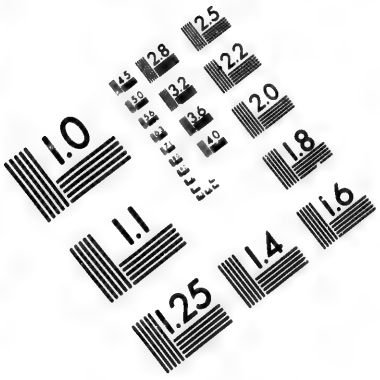
* The Subaltern in America.

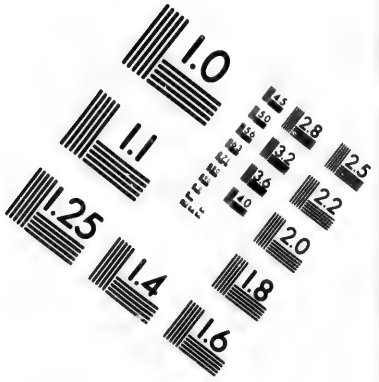
After the night spent at Marlborough, he says, "Fresh, and in excellent spirits, we rose next morning, and, having stood the usual time with our men, began to consider how we should most profitably and agreeably spend the day." They were abundantly supplied with provisions. He says, "The attacks which they from time to time made upon farm-yards and pig-styes were, to a certain degree at least, allowable enough. It would have been unreasonable to expect that hungry soldiers, in an enemy's country, would sit down to digest their hunger, while flocks of poultry and herds of swine were within their reach. And then," he continues, "with respect to tobacco, that principal delicacy of soldiers upon active service, there was no reasonable cause for scarcity or complaint. . . . . To sum up all, the quarter-master arriving soon after the halt with stores of bread and rum, an additional allowance of both was served out, as well to the men as to the officers."

According to their own account, they rested all night between Benedict and Nottingham, all night at Nottingham, all night at Marlborough, and all night at their bivouac near the Long Old Fields, with nothing to disturb their repose or self-complacency at either place; so that, on the morning of the 24th, they ought to have been, and no doubt were, fresh, alert, and buoyant in spirit, while our troops were just the reverse.

Such were the ridiculous and mischievous results of the attempt to apply abstract, theoretic principles of warfare, without considering the circumstances under which they were to be applied, and of attempting to guard half a dozen avenues of approach with a force

insufficient to guard one. Why not have made a choice of evils, if necessary, and selected some one point which, under all the circumstances, might promise the most advantages, if they were but few, concentrated the troops upon that, and, instead of harassing them with fruitless forced marches and countermarches, husbanded their strength, attended to their wants, and employed every moment to improve their efficiency? Surely some position might have been found within so limited a theatre of operations which the enemy, whatever his desi[illegible] would have been afraid to leave gathering streng[illegible] on his rear or flanks, and which he would have been compelled to attack under disadvantages, or abandon his object.





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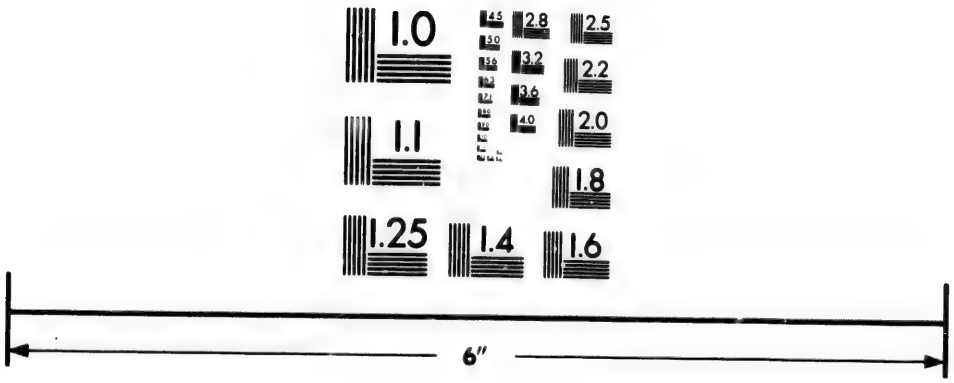

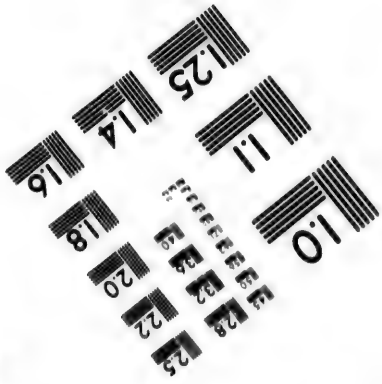

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CHAPTER X.

Cabinet Council at General Winder's Head-quarters at the Eastern Branch Bridge.—The Secretary of War has no Advice or Plan to offer.—The Secretary of State undertakes to arrange the Order of Battle.

It might be supposed that on the 24th of August, if not before, the danger of the capture of the city was sufficiently imminent to stimulate to the utmost the patriotism and intelligence of the high officers of the government, and induce them to lay aside, for a time at least, their petty jealousies and rivalries, and co-operate cordially and energetically for the sake of averting a disaster which would implicate all.

The Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. Campbell, in his letter to the committee, says that the retreat of General Winder to the city "occasioned, as may be readily supposed, considerable agitation in the minds of the citizens." And well it might. The enemy was within three hours' march of the city; his force was estimated at nine or ten thousand men, while ours consisted of only half that number; his troops were experienced and well-disciplined regulars, ours militiamen and raw recruits; they were united in a single body, while ours were divided into two corps, sufficiently distant from each other, and yet each sufficiently near the enemy to make it highly perilous to delay their junction a moment longer, and yet it was uncer-

tain at what point the junction ought to take place. The enemy, free from all doubt as to his own destination, had been steadily advancing, concentrated and governed by a single will; our army had been retreating, was disunited, and its movements evidently subject to the control of several discordant minds, or some one unsettled and capricious mind. *They* were stimulated by the hope of a victory which would redound to their fame throughout Europe, and their licentious soldiery looking eagerly forward to a gratification of brutal propensities, in which it was apprehended that their officers would rather encourage than check them; our troops were depressed by the presentiment of a defeat which would bring shame, merited or unmerited, both upon themselves and their country, would expose their property to pillage and destruction, and, worse than all, their wives and sisters to insult and outrage.

The protracted and unavailing bodily fatigue and anxiety of mind which General Winder had undergone during the preceding week would have unfitted most men for further mental or physical exertion, and, to add to his difficulties, he had, during the night of the 23d, received a severe fall while engaged in the performance of necessary and urgent duties.

On the morning of the 24th he addressed the following note to the Secretary of War:

"Head-quarters, Combs', near the Eastern Branch Bridge,
Wednesday morning, 24th of August, 1814.

"Sir,—I have found it necessary to establish my head-quarters here, the most advanced position convenient to the troops and nearest information. I shall

remain stationary as much as possible, that I may be the more readily found, to issue orders and collect together the various detachments of militia, and give them as rapid a consolidation and organization as possible.

"With great respect, your obedient servant,

"WM. H. WINDER,

"Brig.-gen. commanding 10th Mil. Dist.

"The Hon. Secretary of War.

"P.S.—The news up the river is very threatening. Barney's or some other force should occupy the batteries at Greenleaf's Point and the Navy-yard. I should be glad of the assistance of counsel from yourself and the government. If more convenient, I should make an exertion to go to you the first opportunity."

On the back of this letter, according to the report of the committee, the following memorandum was endorsed in the handwriting of Secretary Armstrong:

"Went to General Winder; found there the President; Mr. Monroe had also been there, but had set out to Bladensburg to arrange the troops and give them an order of battle, as I understood; saw no necessity for ordering Barney to Greenleaf's Point or Navy-yard. Advised the commodore to join the army at Bladensburg, and ordered Minor's regiment to that place. Advised General Winder to leave Barney and the Baltimore brigade upon the enemy's rear and right flank, while he put himself in front with all the rest of his force. Repeated this idea in my letter to him of the 22d."

When General Winder's note was written, he was

not aware that the enemy was moving to Bladensburg, and he was evidently preoccupied with the idea that the attack was to be made, if made at all on Washington, in conjunction with the naval force then moving up the river. When Secretary Armstrong answered the note in person, Mr. Monroe, he says, had already set out to prepare the troops to meet the enemy at Bladensburg. It therefore required no inordinate degree of shrewdness or military skill to advise the commodore to join the army at Bladensburg. But the rest of the advice appears to involve a strategic riddle which none but the initiated can understand, and we shall therefore not attempt to criticise it.

It might be supposed that General Winder had now had enough of the counsel of the secretary and of the government, and would have endeavored to avoid another infliction of it instead of inviting it. But in the strait in which he now found himself, there was nothing else left for him. Those who had involved him in the labyrinth of difficulties might very properly be asked to furnish the clew to it. And he must have been perfectly aware that, whether he asked for the advice or not, he would get it, and therefore he might as well pay the government the compliment of deferring to their superior wisdom.

From the endorsement of General Armstrong, it would seem that he had entirely forgotten the plan which, according to the evidence of his witness M'Clane, he had so earnestly urged the day before, upon the success of which he was ready to stake his life, and with which the commanding general is stated to have been well pleased. Instead of retiring and concentra-

ting the troops at the Capitol, and forming a battery there, which might now have been the best plan, he advises another movement in advance, and still harps upon the enemy's rear, and flanks, and front. Such rapid changes of plan appear wholly irreconcilable with mature and sagacious deliberation.

From the evidence adduced by General Armstrong, and, indeed, from other evidence, it would not appear that he had hitherto been niggardly of advice, however he might have been of substantial aid. On the morning of the 24th he is still prompt with his counsel to operate on the enemy's flank, rear, and front. But such was now the emergency of the occasion, and the impatience and alarm which existed among all classes, that the resources of the secretary's mind did not seem to be unlocked fast enough.

Mr. Campbell, in his letter to the committee, says:

"When it was known, on the evening of the 23d of August, that the troops under General Winder had retired across the Eastern Branch, and encamped in the city, it occasioned, as may be readily supposed, considerable agitation in the minds of the citizens. It appeared to have been expected that, in case our force was not considered sufficient to meet and repulse the enemy on his landing, his advance would be opposed, and his progress, at least, retarded, as far as practicable, by harassing him on his march, erecting defensive works at suitable positions, and throwing such other obstructions in his way as was best calculated to check his movements; for all which operations the nature of the country through which he must pass was said to be favorable. When, therefore, it was stated that he

was near the city, without such means having been either at all, or but partially resorted to, it produced some surprise, as well as inquiry into the causes that led to such a result. Falling in conversation with the Secretary of War on this subject, I expressed my apprehensions that suffering the enemy to approach so near (if his progress could by any possible means have been checked) as to make the fate of the city depend on a single battle, to be maintained, on our part, principally by raw, inexperienced troops, was hazarding too much. He appeared to concur in this opinion. And when I inquired whether the late movements of the troops were made pursuant to his advice or with his approbation, and what plan of operations was determined on to oppose the further progress of the enemy, and also whether our army would have the benefit of his suggestions and advice in directing its future movements, he gave me to understand that the movements which had taken place were not in pursuance of any plan or advice given by him; that General Winder having been appointed to take command of the District, including the city, and the means assigned for its defence placed at his disposal, he was considered as having the direction of their application, and it was to be presumed he had formed such plans for defending the city as he deemed best suited to the emergency and the means he possessed; and that interposing his opinion might be considered indelicate, and perhaps improper, unless he had the approbation of the Executive for so doing, in which case any assistance that his suggestions or advice could render should be afforded.

"It appeared to me an occasion so highly important and critical demanded the united efforts of all the military skill and ability within the reach of the government, and that feelings of delicacy, if their cause could be removed, should not be allowed to come into collision with the public interest; and, I believe, I so expressed myself to General Armstrong."

It appears wholly impossible to reconcile this assertion of General Armstrong, that he had been withheld by feelings of delicacy from offering his suggestions or advice to General Winder, with the evidence which we have already adduced that such suggestions and advice had been freely offered. On none of the occasions where the advice was given does he state that he was directed or authorized by the President to give it, and on one occasion he expressly says, "*My* reasons for advising him [General Winder] were," &c. To repel a charge of having been inert, lukewarm, indifferent to the result of the campaign, he brings abundant evidence to show what pains he had taken to "instruct," "advise," and "urge" the commanding general; to meet another complaint, that the military operations had been such as to place the city in imminent peril, he does not merely deny that General Winder had acted in conformity with his advice, but states the reason which deterred him from offering advice.

On the morning of the 24th, after the meeting of the President and his cabinet at General Winder's headquarters had broken up, and the troops were on their way to Bladensburg, Mr. Campbell took an opportunity of stating to the President General Armstrong's scruples, and the necessity of having the aid of his

military skill and ability. The President replied that he would speak to the secretary on the subject; and subsequently, Mr. Campbell says, "the President joined the secretary, and some conversation took place between them, the purport of which I did not hear."

The manuscript papers of Mr. Madison, to which we have already been indebted, give in substance, if not literally, the following account of this remarkable conversation between the President and his Secretary of War:

"The Secretary of the Treasury, who, though in a very languid state, turned out to join us, observed to me privately that he was grieved to see the great reserve of the Secretary of War [he lodged in the same house with him], who was taking no part on so critical an occasion; that he found him under the impression that, as the means of defending the District had been committed to General Winder, it might not be delicate to intimate his opinions without the approbation of the President, though, with that approbation, he was ready to give any aid he could. Mr. Campbell said that, notwithstanding his just confidence in General Winder, he thought, in the present state of things, which called for all the military skill possible, the military knowledge and experience of the Secretary of War ought to be availed of, and that no consideration of delicacy ought to jeopard the public safety. With these impressions, he said, he thought it his duty to make the communication, and was very anxious that I should take some proper steps in the case. I told him I could scarcely conceive it possible that General Armstrong could have so misconstrued his functions and

duty as Secretary of War; that he could not but know that any proper directions from him would receive any sanction that might be necessary from the executive, nor doubt that any suggestions or advice from him to General Winder would be duly attended to [in this case it had been requested in writing]. I told Mr. C. that I would speak to the Secretary of War explicitly on the subject, and accordingly, turning my horse to him, expressed to him my concern and surprise at the reserve he showed at the present crisis, and at the scruples I understood he had at offering his advice or opinion; that I hoped he had not construed the paper of instructions given him some time before [see paper of August 13th, 1814] so as to restrain him in any respect from the exercise of functions belonging to his office; that, at such a juncture, it was to be expected that he should omit nothing within the proper agency of Secretary of War toward the public defence; and that I thought it proper particularly that he should proceed to Bladensburg and give any aid to General Winder that he could; observing that, if any difficulty on the score of authority should arise, which was not likely, I should be near at hand to remove it (it was my purpose, in case there should be time, to have the members of the cabinet together in Bladensburg, where it was expected General Winder would be, and in consultation with him to decide on the arrangements suited to the posture of things). He said, in reply, that he had put no such construction on the paper of instructions as was alluded to, and that, as I thought it proper, he would proceed to Bladensburg," &c.

This statement of Mr. Madison points very plainly

at the true cause of the national disaster at Bladensburg—want of cordiality between the President and Secretary of War, and between the latter and the commanding general. It is true that we might go back and trace this want of cordiality to a still more remote cause, one all prolific in every species of public evil, and which threatens us with still worse disasters than the battle of Bladensburg—we mean rival aspirations for the chief magistracy. But, as this cause is not so susceptible of indisputable demonstration, and, if it were, is one which, in the abstract, seems to be without any other peaceable remedy than voluntary self-reformation by the people, we shall not task our powers of causation any farther than the facts stated by Mr. Madison himself. That he did not believe in the sincerity of General Armstrong's scruples is evident from the strong terms in which he expresses his "surprise"—he "could scarcely conceive it possible." That General Armstrong's scruples were not sincere is proved by the evidence which he himself furnishes of the repeated advice and instructions given by him to General Winder. He must, therefore, have had some other motive, easier for others to guess at than for himself to confess, for withholding his advice at the moment when it was most needed.

In justice to General Armstrong, we must give his own account of this last solemn appeal to his patriotism and military skill. He says:

"On the morning of the 24th I received a note from General Winder informing me of his retreat and of the approach of the enemy, and asking counsel from me or from the government. This letter was late in

reaching me. It had been opened and passed through other hands. The moment I received it, I hastened, with the late Secretary of the Treasury, to the general's quarters. We found there the President, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Attorney-general. General Winder was on the point of joining the troops at Bladensburg, whither, it was now understood, the enemy was also marching. I took for granted that he had received the counsel he required, for to me he neither stated doubt nor difficulty, nor plan of attack or of defence. This state of things gave occasion to a conversation, principally conducted by the President and the Secretary of the Treasury, which terminated in an understanding that I should repair to the troops, and give such directions as were required by the urgency of the case. I lost not a moment in fulfilling this intention, and had barely time to reconnoitre the march of the enemy, or to inform myself of our own arrangements, when I again met the President, who told me that he had come to a new determination, and that the *military functionaries should be left to the discharge of their own duties, on their own responsibilities.* I now became, of course, a mere spectator of the combat."

It appears, therefore, that within an hour or two of the commencement of the battle, the Secretary of War was called upon to act as a tutor to the commanding general; not to dictate the outline and principal operations of a campaign, but to direct or superintend the manœuvres of troops on a field of battle. It appears, too, that the commanding general himself had no knowledge of this arrangement, for provision was made for

any objection on his part on the score of authority. Mr. Rush, in his letter to the committee of November 3, says, "When the President expressed his intention of going to Bladensburg, he observed, while on the road, that one motive with him was, that, as the Secretary of War, who had just gone on, might be able to render useful assistance toward arrangements in the field, it would be best that the requisite sanction to it should be at hand, preventing thereby, at a moment so important, any possible embarrassment arising from the claims or duties of the commanding general." In other words, the secretary was to issue orders, and if the commanding general should demur to the execution of any one of them, in order to prevent any possible embarrassment arising from *his* claims, the President was to be "at hand" to give the "requisite sanction." The Secretary of War was to waive all delicacy toward the commanding general, but the President himself was to be indulged in preserving it as long as possible, and until a conflict of authority should actually take place. There is an apparent want of dignity and of plain-dealing in an arrangement of this kind for which its ingenuity can hardly atone, though an excuse for it may perhaps be found in the importance of the crisis, and the very natural anxiety of the President to avert a public calamity. But possibly, even in so great an emergency as this, plain dealing might have proved the best policy. At all events, if it had not led to better results, it certainly could not have produced worse.

With all possible respect for the memory of Mr. Madison, we must venture to suggest the opinion that,

however equitable it might be, as a measure of poetical justice, to throw upon the Secretary of War, literally at the eleventh hour, all the responsibility of the *finale* of a campaign, to the success of which he had appeared systematically to refrain from lending any assistance, nevertheless it was not General Armstrong, but the President himself, who, on this occasion, misconstrued the functions and duty of a Secretary of War. According to Mr. Madison's conception of the duties of a Secretary of War, as developed in the extracts which we have been enabled to give from his manuscript papers, that office of the government should necessarily be filled by a practical military man, and one of surpassing skill and ability, competent not only to trace out the plan of a campaign, and dictate grand strategical operations, but to instruct officers in the minutiæ of their profession. Yet this has not been the general understanding, any more than that the office of Secretary of the Navy should be filled by a practical seaman, able to navigate a ship and to direct the evolutions of a squadron. Such an extent and minuteness of professional knowledge, united to sufficient political and other information to enable a man to give counsel in affairs of state, would be a rare combination indeed. There is some inconsistency, too, between these views of Mr. Madison and his taunting remark to General Armstrong on the 29th of August, that the secretary had on other occasions never been backward or scrupulous in his interference, and that he had sometimes taken a latitude in this respect not at all satisfactory, unless Mr. Madison meant that a Secretary of War should confine his interference to the de-

tails of military operations, such as drilling and manœuvring troops, and posting them in order of battle, and leave strategic operations to be determined by the President in cabinet, aided by lights derived from Grotius and Puffendorf, instead of Lloyd, Tempelhoff, and Jomini.

These conversations, as detailed by Mr. Madison himself, suggest the idea that, feeling himself backed by the popular clamor against General Armstrong, who was now in a fair way to have "no friends," he had ventured to seize the opportunity to settle "old scores" with the latter, and was not very particular how he adjusted the account. Certainly it is more within the province of a minister of state, presiding over the War Department, to select a commanding general, than to instruct him after he had been selected, against his wishes and recommendations, by others.

Mr. Rush, in his letter to the committee dated October 15, 1814, gives the following statement of what occurred while he was present at General Winder's head-quarters on the morning of the 24th of August:

"I there found the President, General Winder, Commodore Tingey, and two or three military officers. The Secretary of State, I understood, had previously been there, but had gone on to Bladensburg. The Secretary of the Navy came into the room not long afterward. Of Commodore Tingey's presence I am not certain. The conversation turned upon the route by which it was thought most likely the enemy would make his approach. It was interrupted by dragoons, who had been on scouts, coming in every few minutes with their reports. The preponderance of opinion, at

this period, I took to be, that he would be most likely to move in a direction toward the Potomac, with a view to possess himself of Fort Warburton [Fort Washington] in the first instance. By this course he would secure the passage of his ships, then supposed to be in the river below, and thus their ulterior co-operation, whether in the attack or retreat of his land troops. This way of thinking induced, as I supposed, General Winder to retain a large portion of his force in the neighborhood of the Eastern Branch Bridge, in preference to moving it on, under the existing state of intelligence, toward Bladensburg. In anticipation of success to the enemy's attempts by water or land, or both, some conversation was had as to the proper precautions for blowing up, or otherwise rendering useless, the vessels and public property at the navy-yard. After the lapse of probably an hour from the time I reached head-quarters, an express arrived from General Stansbury, commanding the Baltimore troops at Bladensburg, rendering it at length certain that the British army was advancing in that direction. General Winder immediately put his troops in motion, and marched off with them for Bladensburg.

"When he had left the house, the Secretary of War, in company with the Secretary of the Treasury, arrived there. The President mentioned to the former the information which had just been received, at the same time asking him whether, as it was probable a battle would soon be brought on, he had any advice or plan to offer upon the occasion. He replied that he had not. He added that, as it was to be between regulars and militia, the latter would be beaten. All

who were in the house then came out, the Secretary of War getting on his horse to go to Bladensburg."

It appears, therefore, that General Armstrong went, or rather was carried, to Bladensburg for the purpose of making exertions to falsify his own prediction as to the result. He had to choose between endeavoring to save his reputation as a military man and his credit as a prophet, and the latter was certainly the easier task of the two. In fact, at this critical moment, this "disciple of Jomini," as General Wilkinson terms him, hitherto so full of strategic lore and replete with the finest military maxims, and who could, in theory or on paper, have won a battle against almost any odds, was either like the bird that could sing and would not sing, or else, like some of Don Quixote's models of chivalry, had fallen into the power of a malignant enchanter, and been suddenly bereft of all his military knowledge and resources. He had not "any advice or plan to offer." The oracle was dumb.

According to the following account, which General Wilkinson says was communicated to him by "an officer of character, rank, and intelligence," who was present at General Winder's head-quarters on the morning of the 24th, the Secretary of War, at this juncture, so far from being in a condition to instruct others, was sorely in need of instruction himself. The narrator says:

"During the morning of the 24th I was repeatedly in the tent of General Winder, near the lower bridge on the Eastern Branch, where I found the President, the Secretaries of War and of the Navy, and the Attorney-general assembled, to deliberate on the state of

things and aid the general with their counsel. Of this I was ignorant at the time; and observing no privacy in their deliberations, the interest I took in the public welfare prompted me to obtrude some of my own ideas, more especially as a palpably erroneous opinion appeared to prevail that the enemy would approach by that bridge, and that the troops ought therefore to be detained where they were to defend it. I felt anxious they should move to Bladensburg early, and unite with the militia which had arrived from Baltimore, because it would require a great deal of time to post the men advantageously, and to communicate the orders and instructions how to act, according to the various chances and events of battle. It seemed mere folly to expect the enemy by the way of the bridge, where a dozen men, with half an hour's notice, by destroying it, might arrest their progress. General Armstrong suggested they might lay a bridge of pontoons; I answered, it was impossible; to which he replied, with a sneer, that the word impossible was not to be found in the military vocabulary. The mere belief that an army, certainly short of 7 or 8000 men, destitute, as we knew them to be, of horses to transport their artillery and baggage, could, notwithstanding, contrive to carry an equipage of pontoons sufficient for laying a bridge across a river nearly half a mile wide, demonstrated that General Armstrong's knowledge of pontoon bridges extended not much beyond the name.

"The conversation at General Winder's quarters during the morning was rather desultory; first one suggestion was made and commented on, and then another; no idea seemed to be entertained that it was

necessary to come instantly to a decision how we should act, and to set immediately about it. When I mentioned the certainty of the enemy approaching by the route of Bladensburg in preference to the bridge, and the expediency of taking post there without further delay, I observed my opinion to produce some effect on the mind of the President; by the others it was not much regarded."

There seems to be no lack of concurrent evidence to show that General Armstrong was, notwithstanding his affectation of delicacy, not a very agreeable person to hold a discussion with, his arsenal of arguments consisting in too great part of oaths, sneers, and sardonic smiles. Any man with the ordinary punctilio of a gentleman, who was subject to the authority of a superior so opinionated, rude, and disdainful, would naturally, independently of the dictates of military subordination, defer a collision of opinion with him as long as practicable, and more particularly as his assumption of military science and experience was hitherto little, if at all questioned.

The officer whose statement we have just given was, perhaps, like other men who are in advance of their age and generation, too wise for the precise period of time when his wisdom was exhibited. His opinions as to the improbability of the enemy's being provided with pontoons, or attempting the passage of the Eastern Branch Bridge, showed good common sense as well as military tact. But probably he was not the only intelligent person then present at the general's headquarters; and if, as Mr. Rush states, the preponderant opinion there was that the enemy would move in

the first instance toward Fort Washington, there must have been reasonable ground for the opinion, and therefore for General Winder's not yet changing his position. Among other reasons which may have led to the preponderant opinion were the very natural inference that the enemy's land and naval forces were intended to co-operate with each other, the fact that his army had not taken the direct route from Marlborough to Bladensburg, and the fact that night signals by rockets had been exchanged between the army and the ships. So soon as it was ascertained that the enemy was on the route to Bladensburg, there ceased to be any delay at the bridge.

But the grand cabinet council at the bridge, notwithstanding the admission of amateurs to its deliberations, proved, upon the whole, about as decided a failure as any similar council since the days of the Abderites. At the close of it there was still as much consternation and perplexity as if Ross had that morning dropped suddenly with his army from the clouds, instead of having been, as we are assured, watched at every step of his leisurely progress for four days.

Ross, as we have seen, bivouacked on the night of the 23d at a place called Melwood, about three miles from the Old Fields, and some ten or twelve miles from Washington. He appears to have been astir very early on the morning of the 24th, for at four o'clock that morning* he passed the Old Fields. An advance of two miles farther brought him to a fork of the road, one branch of which runs northward thence to Bladensburg, distant about ten miles, and the other west-

* General Wilkinson, vol. i., p. 775.

ward to the Eastern Branch Bridge, distant seven or eight miles. Here he practiced the same *ruse* as at the fork of the road from Nottingham to Upper Marlborough. He took the road leading to the Eastern Branch Bridge, and continued in it until his last column had got into it,* then suddenly reversed his front and marched rapidly to Bladensburg.

Intelligence of this last movement was not received by General Winder until 10 A.M. or after, and he then ordered General Smith, with the whole of the troops under his command, to proceed to Bladensburg, and Commodore Barney, with the seamen and marines, was soon afterward ordered to proceed to the same place with all dispatch.

Mr. Monroe, who was at General Winder's quarters with the President when the intelligence was received that the enemy was on his way to Bladensburg, offered his services to proceed to that place and join General Stansbury, and both the President and General Winder expressing a wish that he would do so, he "lost not a moment in complying with their desire," and between 11 and 12 o'clock joined General Stansbury, who had, in obedience to the reiterated order of General Winder, moved his troops back to the vicinity of Bladensburg. Mr. Monroe was soon followed by General Winder, then by the Secretary of War, and then by the President and Attorney-general. When Mr. Monroe arrived on the field, the enemy was about three miles distant from Bladensburg. Mr. Rush states that, before the President and himself "could reach the town, the forces of the enemy had possession of it."

* See letter of Mr. Rush, close of chap. xiv.

The object of Mr. Monroe in joining General Stansbury—that of assisting him to post his troops to the best advantage—does not seem to have been made known to that officer, who expresses no gratitude for any services rendered to him by Mr. Monroe on the occasion, but, as we shall see, rather intimates that somebody, he does not know who, disarranged his order of battle without consulting him. This, if true, was doing him no trifling wrong; for it is said by a military writer that "orders of battle are the sublime of war, and it is in their application that the talents and genius of the general shine pre-eminent."

CHAPTER XI.

The Order of Battle.

THE village of Bladensburg is about six miles north-east of Washington, from which city it is approached by a good turnpike-road, formerly the mail-road to Baltimore. North of this road is another old road, which, before the City of Washington was founded, was the route from Georgetown to Bladensburg. These roads meet, at an angle of about forty-five degrees, some sixty or eighty yards from the river at Bladensburg. From the junction the turnpike-road continues on to the river, not abutting, however, immediately at the bridge, but curving for a short distance to the south and east along the margin of the stream, and following a sort of causeway, which, at the time we speak of, was bordered on the west side by thickets of small trees and bushes, and which led to the bridge. The bridge is somewhat less than thirty yards in length, and about four in breadth, and the stream, a few rods above or north of the bridge, is every where fordable.

General Stansbury's troops, after his countermarch to Bladensburg, occupied the triangular field formed by the roads which we have mentioned, near their junction. In this field, on the Georgetown road, and about a hundred and fifty yards from the junction of the roads, there stood and still stands a large wooden barn or tobacco-house, and between the barn and the Washington turnpike there was and is an orchard,

which commences at the barn and extends more than half way across the field, or about a hundred and twenty or thirty yards toward the turnpike. In front of the barn, looking toward the river, the ground has a gentle descent, and upon the brow of the declivity, near the Georgetown road, and some thirty or forty yards in advance of the barn, had been hastily constructed a barbette battery of earthwork, intended for heavy ordnance. This battery was distant about three hundred and fifty yards from the bridge at Bladensburg, nearly west of it, and commanded it by an oblique and not enfilading fire.

In the battery were stationed the two companies of volunteer artillery from the city of Baltimore, commanded by Captains Myer and Magruder, mustering together about one hundred and fifty men, with six six-pounders. The parapet being too high for these guns, and there being no time now to reduce it, the artillerymen were employed, with such tools as they could get, in cutting embrasures and masking them with brushwood. The battalion of riflemen, commanded by Major Pinkney, was placed on the right of the battery, the men being distributed in such positions among the bushes on the low ground, near the junction of the roads, as might best enable them to annoy the enemy on his approach, should he succeed in crossing the bridge or fording the stream. Two companies of Stansbury's militia, commanded by Captains Ducker and Gorsuch, acting as riflemen, but principally armed with muskets, were stationed in the rear of the left of the battery, near the barn, and protected by it, to assist in defending any approach of the enemy by the Georgetown road.

The 5th regiment of Baltimore volunteers, commanded by Lieutenant-colonel Sterett, had been halted about fifty yards in the rear of the position now occupied by Major Pinkney's riflemen, and General Stansbury says that it was his intention to have formed it with its left resting on the right of Pinkney's battalion and fronting the road, along which ran a fence; while Colonels Ragan and Schutz's regiments were to be drawn up in *echelon*, their right resting on the left of Ducker and Gorsuch's companies, and commanding any approach by the Georgetown road. By this proposed disposition of Sterett's regiment, the troops from the city of Baltimore would have been stationed so as to support and give confidence to each other; and as they were well disciplined and reliable troops, and some of them were necessarily to encounter the first shock of the contest, Stansbury's intended order was not the worst that could have been adopted, and at least had the merit of placing all parts of his lines within supporting distance of each other.

But he states that, after the enemy came in sight, while he was engaged in giving some directions to the artillery, Schutz and Ragan's regiments were moved from where he had stationed them, marched up the rising ground in the rear of the orchard, and formed in order of battle about 500 yards, or more than a quarter of a mile, in the rear of the artillery and riflemen, their right, Schutz's regiment, resting on the Washington turnpike. On riding up the hill to ascertain who had ordered this movement, he was informed that General Winder was on the ground. He then immediately rode to the spot where General Winder was,

found him engaged in reconnoitring the enemy, and while conversing with him he discovered that the 5th regiment was also moved from its position, marched up the hill, and formed on the left of the two other regiments, the whole being so placed that their situation and numbers could be clearly seen by the enemy, within reach of his rockets, without any cover, and at such a distance from the artillery and riflemen as to be able to give the latter no support, leaving them to contend with the whole British force. "Whose plan this was," he says, "I know not; it was not mine, nor did it meet with my approbation; but, finding a superior officer on the ground, I concluded he had ordered it, consequently did not interfere."

Major Pinkney, in his statement to the committee, also complains of this alteration, or "new order of battle," as he terms it. "The 5th regiment," he says, "had now, to the great disparagement of my companies and of the artillery, been made to retire to a hill several hundred yards in our rear, but visible, nevertheless, to the enemy, where it could do little more than display its gallantry."

Mr. Monroe states that the removal of the 5th Baltimore regiment, "at a late period," from the rear of the battery to the left of the line, was "a measure taken with reluctance and in haste;" and after finishing his account of the final disposition of Stansbury's troops in order of battle, he says, "after General Stansbury had made this disposition," General Winder arrived on the ground, and, "on taking a view of the order which had been formed, he approved of it. This was the more satisfactory, because it had then

become impossible to make any essential change." This leaves it to be inferred that the whole arrangement was made by General Stansbury, or at least had his concurrence.

General Armstrong, in his "Notices," adverts to this unlucky arrangement and its effects on the progress and issue of the combat, and says that it is only in Lieutenant-colonel Sterett's report that "we are made acquainted with this busy and blundering tactician, whom Stansbury does not know and whom Pinkney would not name;" and he then quotes Sterett's statement that "the 5th regiment was formed under the direction of Colonel Monroe on the left and in line with Stansbury's brigade." But he omits any reference to the subsequent part of Lieutenant-colonel Sterett's statement, in which he says, "I ought to notice that the first line formed on the battle-ground was changed under the direction of Colonel Monroe. On this occasion he observed to me, '*Although you see I am active, you will please bear in mind that this is not my plan*,' or words to this effect."

There are discrepancies in these statements which it is impossible now to reconcile, and which are the more singular because the statements were prepared for the information of a committee of Congress but a few weeks after the battle. Lieutenant-colonel Sterett could hardly have dreamed or imagined the emphatic declaration made to him by Mr. Monroe at the time of changing the position of the 5th regiment; Mr. Monroe himself states that the change was made with reluctance, yet he directed it, and does not say that it had been suggested to him by any one else.

We have dwelt particularly upon this matter, not only to illustrate the confusion existing at the time of forming the order of battle, owing to the near vicinity of the enemy and the number of persons exercising independent authority, but in justice to the troops of Stansbury's line, the only troops who can be said to have fled. For although it is true, as General Winder states in his narrative, that "no advantage of position is proof against groundless panic, and a total want of discipline, skill, and experience," still, advantage of position must help in some degree to prevent a panic; and if the troops are wanting in skill, discipline, and experience, it is the more important to profit as much as possible by all advantages of position.

It was hardly reasonable to expect that raw militiamen would remain firm in the position in which Stansbury's troops were placed, considering the force which they believed to be advancing against them, and the alarm created by the rockets, a species of weapon wholly unknown to them, and apparently of the most formidable description. The orchard would have served as a cover to them, and, if permitted to remain in it, they might have been encouraged by the shelter which it afforded, by the steadiness which the troops in their front displayed under the advance of the enemy, and even by the excitement attending an opportunity of immediate action.

General Winder himself, it appears, had no time to remedy, and hardly to observe, any defects in the arrangement of Stansbury's troops. He says that upon his arrival on the field he rode up to the battery, and continues:

"Upon inquiry, I learned that General Stansbury was on a rising ground upon the left of his line. I rode immediately thither, and found him and Colonel Monroe together. The latter gentleman informed me that he had been aiding General Stansbury to post his command, and wished me to proceed to examine it with them, to see how far I approved of it. We were just proceeding with this view, when some person rode up and stated that news had just been received of a signal victory obtained by General Izard over the enemy, in which one thousand of the enemy were slain and many prisoners taken. I ordered the news to be immediately communicated to the troops, for the purpose of giving additional impulse to their spirits and courage. The column of the enemy at this moment appeared in view, about a mile distant, moving up the Eastern Branch, parallel to our position. From the left, where I was, I perceived that, if the position of the advanced artillery were forced, two or three pieces upon the left of Stansbury would be necessary to scour an orchard which lay between his line and his artillery, and for another rifle company to increase the support of this artillery. These were promptly sent forward by General Smith and posted as hastily as possible, and it was barely accomplished before I was obliged to give orders to the advanced artillery to open upon the enemy, who was descending the street toward the bridge. All further examination or movement was now impossible."

The artillery which General Winder directed to be placed on the left of Stansbury's line was a part of Captain Burch's volunteer artillery from the City of

Washington, with three six-pounders. The additional rifle company brought up to support the Baltimore artillery was Captain Doughty's company, called riflemen, but armed with muskets. General Winder also directed one of Major Pinkney's rifle companies to be withdrawn from the right of the battery and placed on the left of it.

Two pieces of Burch's artillery, with a part of his company, were placed on the main road, near the right of Stansbury's line. And Major Pinkney states that, at his instance, a militia company, armed with muskets, but acting as riflemen, was placed on his right, near the main road, under cover of some bushes and a fence. By a mistake, which he afterward publicly acknowledged, he represents this company as having been commanded by Captain Doughty.

This completes the arrangement of what has been called the first line, composed principally of the troops from the city of Baltimore and its vicinity.

The cavalry, whose history we may as well dispose of at once, seem to have been considered as a part of the first line. Mr. Monroe states that they "were placed to the left, somewhat in the rear of the line." No use was attempted to be made of them during the action. They were under separate and independent commanders, and amounted altogether to about 380. The regular portion of them, under Lieutenant-colonel Laval, a Frenchman and an officer of some experience, were less disciplined and efficient than the volunteers. They were unable to make a charge, the men, from fatigue and hunger, hardly able to sit their horses, or the horses to move; and they were routed, according to

Laval's account, not by the enemy, but by our own troops, "crushed down, horses and all," in the tumult of the flight, one artillery company bursting through a gate and driving right through them.

The second line was composed, with the exception of the body of Maryland militia under the command of Colonel Beall, of the troops which General Winder had with him at the Battalion Old Fields, and which had been hurriedly marched from the Eastern Branch Bridge between 11 and 12 o'clock in the morning of the battle. They had barely time, on arriving on the ground, to make a hasty selection of position.

Commodore Barney's men and the marines were halted on the turnpike about a mile from the stream at Bladensburg. The two eighteen-pounders were planted in the road, forming the left of his line, and the three twelve-pounders immediately on the right of them, a portion of his seamen acting as artillerists, and the rest, with the marines, supporting them as infantry. In front of his position the road descends to a ravine, crossed by a small bridge about 500 yards distant. North of the bridge the ravine is wide and shallow, the bottom of it producing grass, and terminating in a somewhat abrupt acclivity or bluff about 150 yards from the road. On this acclivity the companies commanded by Captains Stull and Davidson were posted; and on an eminence a short distance west of it Major Peter's battery of six guns was placed, so as to command the main road near the bridge over the ravine, and also a part of the space in the rear of Stansbury's line. Lieutenant-colonel Scott, with the regular troops, Colonel Brent, with the 2d regiment of

General Smith's brigade, and Major Waring, with the battalion of Maryland militia, were posted in the rear of Major Peter's battery, the regular troops being on the left. The 1st regiment of General Smith's brigade, commanded by Colonel Magruder, was immediately on the left of Barney's men, its right resting on the road.

The militia under Colonel Beall, who had arrived from Annapolis about half an hour before the battle began, were placed on the right of the seamen and marines, on an eminence about 250 yards from the road; and on the same side of the road, about 150 yards in front of Colonel Beall's position, was Kramer's battalion of Maryland militia.

Nothing is more easy than to criticise the order of battle of a defeated army. In fact, the defeat itself exposes errors which would not otherwise have been observed. And in orders of battle formed with such precipitation as these were, under the direction of a variety of inexperienced heads, it would be strange if errors did not exist which the merest tyro might point out, and which none but a tyro would exult in detecting. Nevertheless, in order to show the defects which here existed, and the little credit due to the enemy for their victory over troops so disadvantageously posted, we shall first quote General Winder's remarks on the subject, and then those of the veteran General Wilkinson, who appears to have carefully and minutely studied the history of this campaign, and who was well acquainted with all the localities in which the events of it occurred.

General Winder says:

"If I had had longer time, or to repeat the action of Bladensburg, I could correct several errors which might materially have affected the issue of that battle. The advanced force ought to have been nearer to the creek, along the edge of the low ground, where they would have been skirted with bushes, and have avoided the inconvenience of the cover which the orchard afforded to the enemy. The edge of the low grounds on the right of the road ought to have been lined with musketry, and a battery of cannon also planted on the field, on the right of the road, directly fronting the bridge; and if Commodore Barney's heavy artillery, with his more expert artillerists, had occupied the position which the advanced artillerists did, and these posts been obstinately defended, the enemy would not have crossed the river at that point, but would have been obliged to make a circuit round to his right, and have crossed above, and at the upper end of the town; or, if the whole force had been posted at the position of the second line, with all the advantage which it afforded, and had acted with tolerable firmness and courage, the event might have been different."

From these remarks of General Winder, he was evidently of the opinion that "if the whole force had been posted at the position of the second line," or at the position of the first line, the result might have been different; in other words, that the main defect of the arrangement of the troops was their being out of supporting distance of each other.

General Wilkinson says:

"It is in vain that professional men shall search for the excellences of this disposition of the American

army in the parts or in the whole, in the advantages of a single point or in the combination of all, whether viewed in respect to the principles and maxims of war, ancient or modern, or with reference to the incidents of desultory warfare, which are not reducible to fixed rules; it is void of plan or proportion; and the naked truth is the best apology for it, that is, it was formed on the spur of the occasion, by pieces, and under the direction of many different chiefs, without preconcert, principle, or design. Shall I expose the particular faults of this disposition? It would not reward the pains; a few remarks will suffice. If the enemy had been *obliged* to pass the bridge, and it *could not* have been *removed or obstructed*, then the greatest force should have been brought to oppose them in debouching from the defile; but the disposition actually made served only to expose the artillery to capture, or, by its sudden flight, and that of its light covering party, to increase the confidence of the enemy and depress the spirits of the American front. But, as the Eastern Branch was every where fordable, and a considerate, judicious antagonist would have crossed the creek at the forks, and turned the left flank of what was called the first line, the disposition was feeble, injudicious, and ineffectual. It is true, the temerity of the enemy, and his contempt for his antagonist, gave this disposition a different character; but then it was too remote from the defile to command it, too remote from the advanced battery to support it; intrinsically too feeble to resist the shock of the enemy's whole force, and too distant from what was called the second line to be seasonably supported by it."

This criticism of General Wilkinson is too full of generalities and epithets, but in substance is pretty much the same as General Winder's. The defile or bridge at Bladensburg should have been better defended, if defended at all; and the troops were not within supporting distance of each other.

General Armstrong does not venture to criticise the order of battle except by innuendo, by sneering at "this busy and blundering tactician," Mr. Monroe, and at General Winder for assigning to Mr. Monroe the duty "of forming his order of battle!" He could not forget that to himself had been assigned the duty of revising and correcting the errors of all, and that therefore to particularize errors which he did not advert to and correct at the time would have been to condemn himself.

The disadvantages of the order of battle, and of the distance of the two lines from each other, were made worse by the fact that the troops of the first line were generally ignorant that there was a second line, or any troops in their rear to support them, or on which they could fall back. They were under the impression that they were to fight the battle unassisted, against a force four or five times as numerous as their own. Lieutenant-colonel Sterett says that he "knew nothing of any second line or reserve being formed to support" them. Major Pinkney states that he "did not know that Brigadier-general Smith's brigade was in or near the field until the action had ceased," nor that Barney's artillery was on the field. General Stansbury states that "before and during the action" he "did not see any of the force" he "was led to expect would support" him. This statement is contradicted by General

Smith's; but whatever information General Stansbury may have had on the subject was of no use to him, and was not communicated by him to his officers. Nor does any rallying-point seem to have been determined on. These and other omissions are to be accounted for by the shortness of the time allowed for preparation, the hurry and excitement occasioned by the near approach of the enemy, the number of commanders acting without concert with each other, and the host of volunteer aides-de-camp and amateur advisers.

The British reports of the battle not only exaggerate the strength of our position and the numbers opposed to them, but invent strength for the position which did not exist. Ross, in his official report of the victory, says, "The enemy was discovered strongly posted on very commanding heights, his advance occupying *a fortified house*, which, with artillery, covered the bridge over the Eastern Branch, across which the British troops had to pass." There was, it is true, a house partially fortified, which commanded the pass by the bridge, but it was not occupied, and therefore must have been rather a convenience than an obstacle to the advance of the British.

Cockburn says, "The enemy, 8000 strong, on ground he had chosen as best adapted for him to defend, where he had time to erect his batteries and concert all his measures, was dislodged as soon as reached," etc. The advanced troops, under Major Pinkney and others, who encountered the first shock of the British army, did not amount to more than 600 men. The regiments under Sterett, Schutz, and Ragan, too far in the rear

to support the advanced troops, mustered about 1800 men. The rest of the army, amounting to about 2700 men, was more than a mile from Bladen. rg, and did not change its position until ordered to retreat. The British, therefore, instead of encountering an "enemy 8000 strong," had to deal with an army altogether of little more than half that number, and did not encounter, at any one time, more than a third of the number.

Gleig, a lieutenant of the 85th regiment, who was present in the action, says that our position was "one of great strength and commanding attitude;" that our "cavalry showed itself in one mass," and our force amounted to 9000 men, a number "exactly doubling" their own, and waiting their approach in "a formidable posture." He describes the passage of the bridge at Bladensburg as if it were another Lodi, and says that our battery opened "with tremendous effect, for at the first discharge almost an entire company was swept down." But the "Subaltern in America," who exaggerates in other matters, states that by the first discharge of our artillery they had one man only killed and two dreadfully wounded, and that by the first fire on the bridge "seven men were swept down," but he does not state how many of the seven men were killed. In point of fact, the bridge was a convenience to the enemy, and if it had not been, there was no necessity for their crossing it, as the stream above was fordable, and was forded by parties of their men.

The statement of the British historian, Alison,* is more exaggerated than any, and inexcusably so, be-

* History of Europe, chap. lxxvi.

cause it is not justified by the official dispatches to his government, to which he refers. He says that the American general had 6500 bayonets, 300 horse, and 600 seamen to work his guns, of which he had twenty-six to the British two, "and with this force, about double that of the British, he took post at Bladensburg, a small village on the left bank of the Potomac, and commanding the only bridge by which that river could be crossed. The great road ran straight through the centre of his position, and *the artillery was placed so as to enfilade all the approaches to the bridge.*" A column of the British, he says, "advanced in double-quick time, in the finest order, through the fire of the guns, dashed across the bridge, carried a fortified house at the other end, which was *occupied and loop-holed*, and, being quickly followed by the other division, spread out their sharp-shooters on either flank, and moved direct against the American batteries. So vigorous was the attack and so feeble the defence, that they were all carried, and the first line thrown back in confusion on the second by the first division alone, not more than fifteen hundred strong, aided by the fire of a few rockets, before the second could get across the bridge. Ten guns were taken, and the whole army, totally routed, took to flight." According to this modest account, 1500 British soldiers crossed a bridge enfiladed by 26 guns, stormed a fortified house at the other end, and routed an army of more than 7000 Americans.

CHAPTER XII.

The Battle.

We shall not invoke either the muse of History or the shade of Cervantes to assist us in describing the battle of Bladensburg, but restrict ourselves, saving an occasional comment, to the prosaic statements of those who shared in the fatigues and dangers of the day.

As the eminent civilian, orator, senator, and diplomat, the Hon. William Pinkney, was the superior officer of the advanced troops, and as he possessed great intelligence as well as cool bravery, and his station on the field was on an eminence where, he says, there was nothing to interrupt his view of the advancing enemy, we shall adopt his account of the commencement of the action. He says:

"The enemy, having reached Bladensburg, descended the hill, about 12 o'clock, in a very fine style, and soon showed his intention to force his way by the bridge. Assisted by some discharges of rockets (which were afterward industriously continued), he made an effort to throw across the bridge a strong body of infantry, but he was driven back at the very commencement of it, with evident loss, by the artillery in the battery, which principally acted upon the street or road near the bridge, and he literally disappeared behind the houses. The effort was not immediately repeated, but the artillery continued to fire with a view, as it

seemed, to interrupt the discharge of rockets, as in some degree it did, and otherwise to check the enemy's operations.

"After a long pause, during which I conjectured (erroneously, as I have since been told) that the enemy, less confident than before of the passage of the bridge, detached a corps of some strength to make its way by the ford in the old Baltimore road, a second attempt was made to cross the bridge, with increased numbers and greater celerity of movement. This, too, was encountered by the artillery in the battery, but not with its former success, although it was served with great spirit, and commanded by officers of acknowledged skill and courage. In consequence, a large column of the enemy, which was every moment re-enforced, either by the way of the bridge or by the ford immediately above it, was able to form on the Washington side, and to menace the battery and the inadequate force by which it was to be supported. While the enemy was yet at a distance, the company on our right (commanded by Captain Doughty) discharged their pieces and fled, although he appeared to do all in his power to restrain them, as I myself did."

As Mr. Pinkney here shows a disposition to become personal in his remarks, and to speak ill of his neighbors, we shall take leave of him. The company to which he refers as having been so eminently prompt in its movements was not commanded by Captain Doughty, as Mr. Pinkney afterward acknowledged in a communication to the National Intelligencer, drawn out by a letter from Captain Doughty, backed by one from Walter Jones, Esq., of Washington. Captain

Doughty, as we have stated, was in a different part of the field, and did great service. We have been unable, after much inquiry, to ascertain what company it was that was so eager to deliver its volley, fulfill its mission, and depart.

We were at first somewhat at a loss to understand Mr. Pinkney's meaning in saying that the enemy "*literally* disappeared behind the houses." There can not be much difference in an optical point of view between a literal and an apparent disappearance; and if a thing is not to be seen, it is of little importance which species of invisibility it may lay claim to, literal or figurative. But the author of the "Subaltern in America," who states that he was with the advanced guard of the British on their approach to Bladensburg, thus explains the phenomenon of the "literal" disappearance of their troops:

"The very first shot cost us three men—one killed, and the other two dreadfully wounded, and the second would have been, in all probability, not less fatal, had we not very wisely avoided it. We inclined at once to the right and left of the road, and, winding round the houses, made our way without any further loss as far as the last range, when we were commanded to lie down and wait for the column.

"In the mean while, the main body, being informed how matters stood [*i. e.*, that Bladensburg was not occupied by the American troops], resumed its march and approached the town. It was saluted, as we had been saluted, by a heavy and well-directed cannonade; but, being warned by some of our people where the danger lay, it so far avoided it as to close up its ranks,

and effect all the arrangements necessary for the assault under cover of the green mound."

The "green mound" referred to is Lowndes' Hill, which is seen on the right of Bladensburg in approaching the village by the turnpike from Washington, and the literal disappearance and "long pause" of which Mr. Pinkney speaks were occasioned by the British troops taking refuge behind Lowndes' Hill and the houses of the village until they had made their final arrangements for the assault and completed their toilet.

General Winder's position also gave him an uninterrupted view of the field of battle; and as he must have been anxiously interested in the result, we naturally look with curiosity to his account of what passed. He says:

"The fire of our advanced artillery occasioned the enemy, who were advancing, and who were light troops, to leave the street, and they crept down under the cover of houses and trees in loose order, so as not to expose them to risk from the shot. It was therefore only occasionally that an object presented at which the artillery could fire.

"In this sort of suspension the enemy began to throw his rockets, and his light troops began to accumulate down in the lower parts of the town and near the bridge, but principally covered from view by the houses. Their light troops, however, soon began to issue out and press across the creek, which was every where fordable, and in most cases lined with bushes or trees, which were sufficient, however, to conceal the movements of light troops who act in the manner of theirs, singly. The advanced riflemen now began to

fire, and continued it for half a dozen rounds, when I observed them to run back to the skirts of the orchard on the left, where they became visible, the boughs of the orchard-trees concealing their original position, as also that of the artillery, from view. A retreat of twenty or thirty yards from their original position toward the left brought them in view on the edge of the orchard. They halted there, and seemed for a moment returning to their position, but in a few minutes entirely broke and retired to the left of Stansbury's line. I immediately ordered the fifth Baltimore regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel Sterett, being the left of Stansbury's line, to advance and sustain the artillery. They promptly commenced this movement; but the rockets, which had, for the first three or four, passed very high above the heads of the line, now received a more horizontal direction, and passed very close above the heads of Shutz's and Ragan's regiments, composing the centre and left [right] of Stansbury's line. A universal flight of these two regiments was the consequence. This leaving the right of the fifth wholly unsupported, I ordered it to halt, rode swiftly across the field toward those who had so shamefully fled, and exerted my voice to the utmost to arrest them. They halted, began to collect, and seemed to be returning to their places. An ill-founded reliance that their officers would succeed in rallying them when I had thus succeeded in stopping the greatest part of them induced me immediately to return to the fifth, the situation of which was likely to become very critical, and that position gave me the best command of view. To my astonishment and mortification, however, when I had

regained my position, I found the whole of these regiments (except a few of Ragan's, not more than forty, rallied by himself, and as many, perhaps, of Shutz's, rallied, I learn, by Captain Shower and Captain ———, whose name I do not recollect) were flying in the utmost precipitation and disorder.

"The advanced artillery had immediately followed the riflemen, and retired by the left of the fifth. I directed them to take post on a rising ground which I pointed out in the rear. The fifth, and the artillery on its left, still remained, and I hoped that their fire, notwithstanding the obstruction of the boughs of the orchard, which, being below, covered the enemy, would have been enabled to scour this approach and prevent his advance. The enemy's light troops, by single men, showed themselves on the lower edge of the left of the orchard, and received the fire of this artillery and the fifth, which made them draw back. The cover to them was, however, so complete, that they were enabled to advance singly and take positions from which their fire annoyed the fifth considerably, without either that regiment or the artillery being able to return the fire with any probability of effect. In this situation, I had actually given an order to the fifth and artillery to retire up the hill toward a wood more to the left and a little to the rear, for the purpose of drawing them farther from the orchard and out of reach of the enemy's fire while he was sheltered by the orchard. An aversion, however, to retire before the necessity became stronger, and the hope that the enemy would issue in a body from the left of the orchard and enable us to act upon him on terms of equality, and the fear that a

movement of retreat might, in raw troops, produce some confusion and lose us this chance, induced me to countermand the order, and direct the artillery to fire into a wooden barn on the lower end of the orchard, behind which I supposed the enemy might be sheltered in considerable numbers. The fire of the enemy now began, however, to annoy the fifth still more in wounding several of them, and a strong column of the enemy having passed up the road as high as the right of the fifth, and beginning to deploy into the field to take them in front, I directed the artillery to retire to the hill to which I had directed the Baltimore artillery to proceed, and halt, and ordered the fifth regiment also to retire. This corps, which had heretofore acted so firmly, evinced the usual incapacity of raw troops to make orderly movements in the face of the enemy, and their retreat in a very few moments became a flight of absolute and total disorder."

This statement of General Winder shows very clearly the value of the orchard and barn as a military position, the advantage which its possession gave to the enemy, and the difficulty which they probably would have experienced in driving back our troops if they had been suffered to remain near and in it, as General Stansbury intended; but a mere militia general could not be supposed to have any judgment or tact whatever in military matters, or to be right even by accident.

General Stansbury says:

"The artillery, under the command of Captains Myer and Magruder, and the riflemen, the whole under the command of Major Pinkney, behaved in the most

gallant manner (this gallant officer, in the course of the action, was severely wounded); but the superior force of the enemy, and the rapidity with which he moved, compelled them to retire. But one of the pieces was lost, and that was rendered harmless before it was abandoned.

"The enemy took every advantage of the cover afforded them by the trees of the orchard, and their light troops from thence kept up a galling fire on our line. On this party, when advanced nearer, the 5th regiment, under Colonel Sterett, opened a steady and well-directed fire, which was followed by the fire from the right, and ultimately from our centre, when the firing on both sides became general. After a few rounds the troops on the right began to break. I rode along the lines, and gave orders to the officers to cut down those who attempted to fly, and suffer no man to leave the lines. On arriving at the left of the centre regiment, I found Lieutenant-colonel Shutz's men giving way, and that brave officer, with Major Kemp, aided by my aid-de-camp, Major Woodyear, exerting themselves in rallying and forming them again. Captain Galloway's company, and part of Captains Randall's and Shower's companies, were rallied and formed again, and behaved gallantly. The rest of Colonels Shutz's and Ragan's regiments fled in disorder, notwithstanding the extraordinary exertions of their officers to prevent it. On the left, I soon after discovered a part of the 5th regiment giving way, and that excellent officer, Lieutenant-colonel Sterett, with those under him, most actively engaged forming them again. Soon after, the retreat became general, and all attempts to rally them

and make a second stand were fruitless. With a body of United States cavalry, I endeavored to protect the rear and right of the retreating men, so as to prevent their falling into the enemy's possession.

"The men under my command were worn down and nearly exhausted from long and forced marches, want of food, and watching. They had been, with very little intermission, under arms and marching from the time of their departure from Baltimore, with but little sleep, bad provisions, and but little opportunity to cook. They certainly were not in a situation to go into battle."

Lieutenant-colonel Sterett, the commander of the 5th regiment, is very brief in his account of the action. At the conclusion of it he says:

"The imposing front of the enemy was never disconcerted by the fire of the artillery or riflemen, and the brigade of General Stansbury was seen to fly as soon as the action became serious. No second line or reserve appeared to advance or support us, and we were outflanked and defeated in as short a time as such an operation could well be performed."

This statement of Colonel Sterett hardly does justice to his own countrymen and fellow-soldiers. All accounts show that the imposing front of the enemy was disconcerted by the artillery on his advance to the bridge—enough so to induce him to waive dignity for safety, and take refuge behind the houses and Lowndes' Hill. The British accounts alone are not to be relied on, because some of them exaggerate the resistance in order to magnify their own valor in overcoming it. But on comparing all accounts, American and British,

it is evident that even Stansbury's brigade stood its ground long enough to show that, under different auspices, it would have performed its part well. Gleig, the writer of the "Campaign at Washington," states that the precipitate retreat upon it of our riflemen "threw it into disorder before it had fired a shot." Stansbury says that before his brigade broke "the firing on both sides became general," and that "after a few rounds the troops on the right began to break."

Sterett says that Stansbury's brigade "was seen to fly as soon as the action became serious." Probably among the circumstances which induced the men to think that matters were taking a serious turn were these: the shower of rockets among them; the hurried retreat of the riflemen upon them; the galling fire from the orchard; the continued advance of fresh troops of the enemy, amounting, as they had been informed, to eight or ten thousand veterans; no knowledge that any reserved troops were in their rear; and the conviction which every man of common sense among them must have felt, that, under these circumstances, to continue longer on the field would expose them to the danger of being cut to pieces. It is difficult to understand the motive for placing or keeping them in such a position. It was not a position to be defended at all hazards and at any cost of life, in order to gain time. What was the time wanted for? The troops in the rear were not advancing, nor does it appear that there was any design that they should advance. Further continuance in such a position could be only for the purpose of testing the experiment whether a body of raw militia-men, in an open field,

and in pitched battle, could defeat four or five times their number of regular and veteran troops.

It does not appear how long the action with the first line lasted. Lieutenant-colonel Sterett's assertion that the line was "outflanked and defeated in as short a time as such an operation could well be performed," is altogether vague, and as he was a militia officer, probably never in action before, he could hardly have known the average time required, in general, to perform the operation of outflanking and defeating an army. Mr. John Law, whose statement we have already referred to, says that the Baltimore artillery fired about ten rounds before it retreated; and the last discharges of the artillery, which are usually the most destructive, were in this case the least so, as none of the advanced artillery was furnished with any other than round shot; and Mr. Pinkney states that the half-formed embrasures of the work in which the Baltimore artillery was placed rendered it "difficult, if not impracticable, to depress the guns in those embrasures (the ground of the battery being considerably elevated) so as to touch the enemy after his near approach."

Cockburn states in his official dispatch that our army, 8000 strong, was "dislodged as soon as reached" by a division of the British army "not amounting to more than 1500 men." Admitting—and the admission is certainly a charitable one—that he does not misstate the numbers on both sides, diminishing the one as much as he exaggerates the other, and that not more than 1500 of the British army had time to reach the field before the first line was defeated, still, in point of fact, those 1500 had to contend with not more than

700 of our own troops. They were protected by the orchard and barn, and by distance, from the fire of the 5th regiment and Stansbury's brigade. The only part of the line, exclusive of the advanced troops, which could have done them any damage, was Burch's battery of three pieces, and Captain Doughty's company, which was thrown forward, in crotchet form, on the left of Stansbury's line, and which opened an effective fire upon them while they were near the barn.

The British accounts describe but one battle. There were, in fact, two, as distinct as if they had taken place on different days and with different armies. The second line of the American army was nearly a mile in the rear of the first, and there had been no communication between them, no re-enforcement from one to the other, except that before the appearance of the enemy at Bladensburg Captain Doughty's company and Burch's company of artillery had been advanced from the second to the first line. None of the troops of the first line, after its defeat, retreated to or rallied upon the second line, which was left, therefore, to encounter the full force of an enemy inspirited by its victory over the first line and *outnumbering the second nearly two to one.*

The enemy proceeded to make a simultaneous attack on both flanks of the second line, as they had upon the first, their right wing led by Colonel Brooke, of the 44th regiment, continuing up the old Georgetown road in pursuit of the routed troops, and their left, under Colonel Thornton, advancing along the turnpike to the attack of Barney's battery. The reception which the commodore gave his visitors upon this occasion we

shall leave him to relate in his own language, upon which we shall afterward make a few comments. After speaking of the heat of the weather, the crippled condition of his men from the severe marches they had experienced the days before, many of them being without shoes, and the hurried manner in which he had been compelled to take a position, he says:

"At length the enemy made his appearance on the main road in force, and in front of my battery, and on seeing us made a halt. I reserved our fire. In a few moments the enemy again advanced, when I ordered an eighteen-pounder to be fired, which completely cleared the road; shortly after, a second and a third attempt was made by the enemy to come forward, but all were destroyed. They then crossed over into an open field, and attempted to flank our right: he was there met by three twelve-pounders, the marines under Captain Miller, and my men acting as infantry, and again was totally cut up. By this time not a vestige of the American army remained, except a body of five or six hundred posted on a height on my right, from whom I expected much support from their fine situation.

"The enemy from this period never appeared in force in front of us; they pushed forward their sharpshooters, one of whom shot my horse under me, who fell dead between two of my guns. The enemy, who had been kept in check by our fire for nearly half an hour, now began to outflank us on the right. Our guns were turned that way. He pushed up the hill about two or three hundred toward the corps of Americans stationed as above described, who, to my great mortification, made no resistance, giving a fire or two,

and retired. In this situation we had the whole army to contend with. Our ammunition was expended, and, unfortunately, the drivers of our ammunition wagons had gone off in the general panic."

The commodore himself was severely wounded, and while lying in that condition on the ground, Ross and Cockburn came up to him, behaved to him "with the most marked attention, respect, and politeness," had a surgeon brought and his wound dressed immediately. He says: "Captain Wainwright, first captain to Admiral Cochrane, remained with me and behaved to me as if I were a brother. During the stay of the enemy at Bladensburg I received every marked attention possible from the officers of the navy and army."

But these polite attentions did not prevent the commodore from afterward denouncing Ross for the misstatements contained in his official dispatch. In a communication to the National Intelligencer in relation to that dispatch, the commodore says:

"The general then goes on to state how his troops advanced, and by the irresistible attack of the bayonet the enemy got into confusion and fled. It would have been more to the honor of the general if he had told that his men never had it in their power to use the bayonet but once, and then declined it; for, after every attempt was made by his men to advance on the main road, and were driven by the artillery under my command into the field, they were rallied and again led on by Colonel Thornton, who advanced to within fifty yards of our position, where he was met by the marines under Captains Miller and Sevier, with the flotilla men. Colonel Thornton fell dangerously wound-

ed. Captain Hamilton and Lieutenant Codd were killed. Lieutenant Stevely, of the 'King's Own,' also severely wounded. The veterans of the eighty-fifth and fourth, or 'King's Own,' gave way. So far from using the bayonet, they fled before our men, who pursued them, the sailors crying out to 'board' them. Nor did the enemy rally until they got into a ravine covered with woods, leaving their officers in our power. Then our men returned to their station. General Ross, in person, was obliged to take command, but dared not lead them on in front, but pushed out on our flank. Our ammunition being expended, we were necessitated to retire."

From this statement of Commodore Barney himself, it appears that his men did not, as others have asserted, stand by their guns until several of them were bayoneted. He, however, makes the most of the part played by the men under his command, which was sufficiently creditable to them to render it unnecessary to enhance their merit by the reflections and innuendoes to the disparagement of others contained in his assertion that "by this time not a vestige of the American army remained, except a body of five or six hundred posted" on his right, which body, to his "great mortification, made no resistance, giving a fire or two, and retiring." The truth is, that none of the troops on his right or left retired until they had been ordered to retreat by the general-in-chief.

From Commodore Barney's statements it would appear that none of the troops of the second line performed any service except those under his command. But the light brigade of the enemy, in advancing

through the defile near the bridge over the ravine, came within range of Peter's battery, which opened a cross fire upon them with considerable effect. After the first discharge from Barney's battery, the British eighty-fifth regiment was thrown out on its right with a view to carry the left flank of that battery; and having advanced within range of Magruder's regiment, met a reception which caused it to retrograde; and crossing the road in open order, it united with the fourth, which had deployed on the left on the margin of the ravine, coming in conflict there with Kramer's command, which, after a spirited resistance, fell back to the right of the line. The Subaltern in America speaks particularly of the severity of the fire from every part of the American line commanding the defile until the right of the line was flanked. The loss sustained here by the British, as well from the murderous discharge of grape from Barney's battery, which mowed down whole companies, as from the cross fire of Peter's battery and the discharge of musketry, exceeded, according to the accounts of the British officers who were present, that of any battle in which they had ever been engaged, considering the numbers of the contending forces.

In the mean time, the right wing of the British, under Colonel Brook, was approaching the left of Peter's battery, which, for want of sufficient support, must soon have been carried. At this crisis, General Winder, who had been vainly endeavoring to arrest or direct the flight of his first line, arrived upon the ground, and perceiving his right flank in the act of being turned, and his left nearly in the same predicament, gave or-

ders for the line to retreat. The manner in which the order was executed by General Smith we shall state in his own words:

"The order to retreat was executed by regiments and corps as they had been formed, and with as much order as the nature of the case would permit. The first and second regiments halted and formed, after retreating five or six hundred paces, but were again ordered by General Winder to retire. At this moment I fell in with General Winder, and, after a short conference with him, was directed to move on, and collect the troops, and prepare to make a stand on the heights westward of the turnpike gate. This was done as fast as the troops came up. A front was again presented toward the enemy, consisting principally of the troops of this District, a part of those who had been attached to them in the action, and a Virginia regiment of about four hundred men, under Colonel Miner, which met us at this place. While the line was yet forming, I received orders from General Winder to fall back to the Capitol, and there form for battle. I took the liberty of suggesting my impression of the preferable situation we then occupied; but, expecting that he might be joined there by some of his dispersed troops of the front line, he chose to make the stand there. Approaching the Capitol, I halted the troops, and requested his orders as to the formation of the line. We found no auxiliaries there. He then conferred for a few moments with General Armstrong, who was a short distance from us, and then gave orders that the whole should retreat through Washington and Georgetown. It is impossible to do justice to the anguish evinced

by the troops of Washington and Georgetown on the receiving of this order. The idea of leaving their families, their houses, and their homes at the mercy of an enraged enemy was insupportable. To preserve that order which was maintained during the retreat was now no longer practicable."

We can add our own testimony, as an eye-witness, to General Smith's statement of the effect which the final order to retreat had upon the troops under his command. Some shed tears, others uttered imprecations, and all evinced the utmost astonishment and indignation; for it was impossible for them to comprehend why troops who were willing to risk an encounter with the enemy should be denied the opportunity.

The official dispatch of General Ross states that the number of his killed on the 24th was 56, and wounded 185, including officers and men, but his real loss was more than double that number. Dr. Catlett, General Winder's staff-surgeon, who was permitted by the enemy to proceed to Bladensburg on the day after the battle to attend to some of our wounded, states that one of the British surgeons there informed him that they had that day buried about one hundred of their men on the field; and, after the retreat of the British, fifty or sixty were found and buried by our own men. Their wounded Catlett estimates at "three or four hundred, besides forty or fifty left in this city."

The loss on our side was 26 killed and 51 wounded.

CHAPTER XIII.

Remarks on the Battle and Retreat.

At the conclusion of his letter to the chairman of the committee of investigation, General Smith, the commander of the District militia, says:

"The troops of Washington and Georgetown have been assailed in the public prints and elsewhere with calumnies as unmerited as they are cruel and wanton. They have heard of them with indignant astonishment. Conscious that in no instance have they been wanting in the duty they owed to their country or to themselves, but, on the contrary, in obedience to the call of their government, have with alacrity obeyed its orders, and intrepidly fronted an enemy vastly their superior in force, and never yielded the ground to him but by orders emanating from superior authority, they can not restrain the feelings excited by such manifest, such unprovoked injustice."

It is not difficult to account for this burden of calumny thrown upon the District troops. In the first place, a defeated party is always in the wrong, and may be blamed with impunity by all the world. In the next place, there is always a multitude of intrepid spirits so overburdened with untried valor themselves that they are wholly unable to sympathize with any want of it in others, and are prodigiously indignant at those who will not fight for their country to the last

extremity against any conceivable odds, and even against orders. Thirdly, the defence of the city was peculiarly the business of the District troops; they were—if we may venture to use language so unsuited to the dignity of history—"fighting on their own dunghill;" and the fact that so many of them retreated without giving or receiving a scratch was strong *prima facie* proof that they had "shown the white feather." Even Stansbury's men, no doubt, excused themselves to their neighbors, after their return home, by saying, "How could we be expected to fight when we were not supported by those cowardly District troops?"

But the most potent cause of all is, that the great functionaries of government, knowing that the blame of the capture of the city must rest either on themselves or on the troops, were determined to throw it upon the latter, and their position and influence enabled them to do it so effectually, that the imputation cast from this high source has become fixed in history and tradition "like a fly in amber."

General Armstrong, in his letter to the chairman of the committee, speaking of "the disasters of the day," says, "Without all doubt the determining cause of these is to be found in that love of life which, in many of the corps, predominated over a love of country and of honor;" the meaning of which paraphrase is, in plain English, that the main cause of the defeat was the cowardice of the troops.

The Court of Inquiry, of which General Scott was president, convened for the purpose of examining into and reporting upon the conduct of General Winder,

gave it as their unanimous opinion that no censure was attributable to him, but that, "on the contrary," he was "entitled to no little commendation." This, by implication, unexplained, threw all the blame upon the troops; and the implication was strengthened by the remark of the court that all of the troops, "excepting 400, were militia."

General Winder himself, in his narrative, when speaking of the defects in the order of battle, intimates, as we have seen, that "groundless panic" was the main cause of the defeat. He refers to the "incapacity of raw troops to make orderly movements in the face of the enemy;" states that Colonel Beall's detachment "fled," abandoning their "commanding position" to the enemy, and is sparing of any commendation except upon Barney's command, though none could testify better than himself to the patience under fatigue and privation, the readiness to encounter danger, and the firmness in its presence, displayed by the great majority of his troops, militia as they were.

There seems to have been a tacit understanding among all the leading men, and the friends of all the leading men, whose own conduct might by any possibility be called in question, that it would be much more prudent to let the obloquy rest upon the troops than to undertake seriously to assail each other; and therefore, without appointing any Congressional committee, or any court of inquiry, to investigate the specific allegation of cowardice made against the troops, they were convicted of the charge by a sort of acclamation, in which many were good-humored enough to

join themselves, and rally each other on the "Bladensburg Races." Yet, as even this joke—encouraged for a serious purpose by some—has left a stigma, not only upon the character of the District troops, but upon that of the American people, and upon the efficiency of militia troops generally, justice to all requires it to be stated that there is not a particle of evidence to convict any portion of the troops assembled at Bladensburg, Stansbury's brigade excepted, of want of courage, want of subordination, or want of any other soldierly quality. In all other cases the retreat of the troops was in consequence of orders from the commanding general, which it was sometimes found necessary to reiterate, from the reluctance of the troops to obey them.

The repeated orders to retire given to the advanced troops between the Wood Yard and Nottingham were, according to Major Peter's statement and to our own personal knowledge, very unwillingly obeyed. At the Old Fields, on the 23d of August, the troops showed no signs of unwillingness for the encounter, great as they supposed the numerical superiority of the enemy to be. At Bladensburg, it was with the utmost reluctance that General Smith's troops obeyed the order to retreat. As he states, "The first and second regiments, after retreating five or six hundred yards, halted and formed, but were again ordered by General Winder to retire."

With respect to the regular troops under Lieutenant-colonel Scott, we have been informed by the Honorable William D. Merrick, of Maryland, who was the adjutant of the command, that on the approach of the right column of the enemy, after the defeat of the first

line, Scott's command changed front in order to meet them, and received the fire of the British advance, which killed and wounded five or six of the men. While the troops were in the act of returning the fire, General Winder rode up to them and gave the order to retreat to Washington. On being asked by Adjutant Merrick, who was on horseback, whether the troops might not be allowed to return the fire of the enemy, General Winder demanded to know who commanded the regiment. The adjutant pointed to Lieutenant-colonel Scott, who was then on foot, his horse having been killed, when General Winder repeated the order, directing him to retire immediately.

The veteran Colonel Beall, whose command appears to such little advantage in the narrative of General Winder and report of Commodore Barney, in his brief and modest letter to the chairman of the committee makes no other excuse for his men than to state that they were fatigued and exhausted from their march of sixteen miles that morning before the battle, and that, according to his own impression, they did not give way "as early as is represented by some." In a letter published by General Wilkinson in his Memoirs,* Colonel Beall says: "I do not say some of my men did not retreat too soon, but what number they were I know not. The men who buried the dead of the enemy say that near the ground I occupied sixteen were killed, and I think my loss was four. The adjutant of the first regiment of the Columbian Brigade says the flotilla-men and his regiment retreated to the city together,† and he returned and met me at the turn-

* Vol. i., p. 785. † This is well remembered by the author.

pike gate." General Wilkinson also publishes extracts from two letters addressed to Colonel Beall a few weeks after the battle by John E. Howard, Esq., of Maryland, a son of the hero of the Cowpens. In the first letter, Mr. Howard, after adverting to Commodore Barney's report, says, "I was the person who delivered to you the order from General Winder to retreat, to avoid being outflanked and cut off. I acted as an aid to the general." In the second letter he states, "I apprehended that the order I delivered to you was the first you had to retreat, and I perfectly recollect your reply, 'Does General Winder order me to retreat before we have fired a shot, and the men in perfect order?' and while repeating the order, the enemy began to fire from the wood which was in front of your right wing." "I feel prompted to address you," says Mr. Howard, in his first letter, "from accidentally witnessing your conduct in the rear of the retreating army, when you drew a line across the road, and rallied, and formed your men in regular order before they were permitted to march on."

The most that can be expected of raw troops, or indeed of any troops, is, that they will obey orders, and not retreat until ordered to do so. If they satisfy these requirements, all the blame attending their movements must fall elsewhere. It is preposterous to expect that any troops, in their anxiety to fight, would mutinously disobey an order to retreat, and yet not a few of the "Bladensburg heroes" were on the point of doing this.

On the other hand, there is no ground for attributing any motive to General Winder in giving these or-

ders to retreat other than the humane one of preventing a useless sacrifice of the lives of men who were not mere worthless, vagabond mercenaries, but generally respectable citizens, many with families, wives, mothers, or sisters dependent on them, or anxiously waiting their return from danger. There is an abundance of concurrent and spontaneous testimony as to the personal gallantry, zeal, and energy which General Winder himself displayed in the field of battle. By continuing the contest he might have hoped still to retrieve a victory, which would be the more creditable from its being unexpected, and achieved under desperate circumstances. A less scrupulous commander would not have hesitated to risk the lives of his men on such a chance. There can be no doubt, therefore, that his motives in ordering the retreat were creditable to him, and no question can arise except as to the necessity or propriety of the retreat in a military point of view.

Upon this subject General Wilkinson says:

"When General Winder saw the first line so easily routed, without adverting to the primary cause, the example of the President, and believing the whole force of the enemy had been brought into action, it was natural he should become solicitous for the safety of his rear; yet I consider the order for retreat unfortunate, because of my confidence in the materials which composed what was called the second line; Major Peter's command, consisting of a company of well-trained artillery, with Stull's and Davidson's companies of infantry, would have breasted any equal number, no matter of what country or corps; and if this detach-

ment had been joined to the regular troops under Lieutenant-colonel Scott, who impatiently expected the enemy, having changed his front and advanced to meet them, the exhausted Britons must have surrendered in a few minutes, or been dispersed and captured; and if Magruder's regiment had been pushed forward, passed Commodore Barney's battery, wheeled to the right, and taken Colonel Thornton in flank and rear, he would have shared the fate of the right wing, while Colonel Brent's regiment, held in reserve, could have co-operated to the right or left, if necessary."

But General Wilkinson, in his desire to show in how few minutes he could have disposed of "the exhausted Britons," forgets again the very first principles of the art of war, or else underrates the true strength of the enemy, not known till after the battle, as much as it was overrated by others before.

It requires no study of the science of war to understand the simple proposition, truism, or axiom upon which all strategy is based, that of two bodies of men engaged in battle with each other, if all other things be equal, the most numerous body will conquer.

In order, therefore, to anticipate victory for the less numerous body, we must be able to reckon upon some odds in their favor.

What odds had the second line in its favor to counterbalance a disparity of numbers against them of nearly two to one?

As to the advantage in artillery, that might serve to encourage raw troops, but could not intimidate veterans. Every military man knows that the value of artillery depends on its position, and that it is of but

little avail in an open field against a decided superiority in other arms, unless it be light artillery, well managed, and on ground adapted for it. Barney's artillery was as well managed as it could be, but it became useless as soon as the enemy's superiority in infantry enabled him to outflank the line; and the destruction which it previously occasioned was owing less to its position and management than to the ordinary British mode of fighting, which is that of "taking the bull by the horns," and depending more on sheer courage than manœuvring.

As to discipline and experience, the advantage was undeniably and greatly on the side of the British. As to the exhaustion of their troops, even if not exaggerated, it was then unknown, and, as we have seen, from the undisturbed repose which they enjoyed every night, their leisurely marches, and sufficiency of food, their exhaustion must have been rather the temporary result of hasty and violent exertion, while that of our troops was the effect of protracted fatigue and privation. As to courage, the British troops are by no means deficient in that requisite, as their whole history proves; and the most frantic valor in the field is of no avail against science, discipline, and numbers combined, backed by the ordinary courage of experienced troops. If it were otherwise, there could be no such thing as the art of war or the science of strategy.

The supposition that General Winder, with only half his army, and that half outflanked, could win a victory which it was calculated that twice his army would be barely enough to achieve, is preposterous. General Winder, if possessing any knowledge whatev-

er, must have known this, and must also have known that to delay his retreat until his men were actually driven back by the bayonet would entail upon them the slaughter which always attends a retreat under such circumstances.

The danger of pitched battles—the policy of avoiding them as long as possible when an adversary seeks them, which all military writers inculcate without exception, and most particularly in defensive warfare, consists in the fact that, when an army is routed—above all, an army of militia-men—there is an end, for a time at least, of that army as an organized body. It is easy to speculate in the closet on what might be done under desperate circumstances by desperate exertions. Napoleon might have been told, after the battle of Waterloo, by some "disciple of Jomini," you still have some thousands of men left, some guns, and cavalry: fall on the enemy's flank, harass him by small attacks, etc. But, as Napoleon himself prophetically said on the eve of the battle of Leipsic, "*Entre une bataille perdue et une bataille gagnée la distance est immense, il y a des empires.*"

We shall, therefore, not stop to criticise the proceedings of General Winder after the battle, or to review the means and opportunities which may have existed for destroying or damaging the enemy on his retreat from the city, or during his march back to his shipping. Ross and Cockburn, no doubt, made their calculations as to the time for which it would be safe for them to remain. They knew, as experienced military men, how little was to be apprehended from a routed army, or from a population unaccustomed to war, when

overawed by a victorious army. A remarkable fact in illustration of this is mentioned by General Wilkinson,* who states that the enemy first entered the city with about 200 men, "and so complete was the conquest, that when this party withdrew to their camp at two miles' distance, a single sentinel, who had been accidentally left on post near the office of the National Intelligencer, kept undisturbed possession of the central part of the metropolis until the next morning, of which there are several living witnesses." It can be no reproach, however, to the citizens of Washington that they did not draw down upon themselves the vengeance of the enemy by the slaughter of this solitary sentinel. Not even the troops, and still less the unarmed citizens, could be justly blamed or ridiculed for exhibiting still greater and more unquestionable evidences of a panic, which the principal officers of the government were the first to set the example of, which they almost created, and did nothing to allay.

We have adverted to the opinion of the court of inquiry in General Winder's case not only completely exonerating him from blame, but awarding to him "no little commendation." The court, therefore, notwithstanding the disposition of military men to criticise the professional conduct of each other, could have perceived none of the errors which General Armstrong, General Wilkinson, and others have pretended to discover in the management of the campaign, or else did not consider General Winder responsible for them. They could not even have discerned, or considered as attributable to General Winder, the several errors

* Vol. i., p. 791.

which he himself acknowledges "might materially have affected the issue" of the battle, and which, if he "had had longer time, or to repeat the action at Bladensburg," he could have corrected; nor the retreat on the evening of the 23d from the Old Fields "to the bridge instead of Bladensburg," which General Winder himself seemed to think was an error, though "of that sort" which is "only found to be an error by experience;" nor the omission to designate a rallying-point.

The court no doubt considered, and very properly, that General Winder was relieved from all responsibility for the management of the campaign by the interference of the President and cabinet, which interference was a matter of notoriety. It would have been more frank and soldierlike, and more just to the nation at large, as well as the troops engaged, to have said so in plain terms. But the stern sense of justice and independence of feeling which would have prompted such a course is more suited to the early and "green" days of the ancient republics, or to an imaginary Utopia, than to the atmosphere of what is now called a "Republican court," where servility is sometimes as rife and rank, and as well rewarded, as in the court of an autocrat. The court were sensible, no doubt, of the reception such a candid opinion would have met with from a President and administration who, in order to gloss over their own mismanagement and imbecility, descended to the expedient of introducing statements in a solemn proclamation addressed to the people which were not warranted by the facts.

The President's proclamation of the 1st of Septem-

ber, 1814, declares that the enemy, "by a sudden incursion," had succeeded in invading the capital of the nation, defended at the moment by troops less numerous than their own. If it could be demonstrated that there was no reason to expect that the enemy would invade the capital until 10 o'clock on the morning of the 24th of August, when it was ascertained that he had taken the route to Bladensburg, then the incursion might be called "sudden;" but the term could not, with any degree of reason or truth, be applied to an event which had been apprehended for months, and the actual progress of which had been watched for nearly a week. And if the "moment" when our troops were less numerous applies to the specific instants of time when the two lines at Bladensburg were respectively and successively assailed by the British force, then of each specific instant it might be said that the capital was "defended at the moment by troops less numerous" than those of the enemy.

The proclamation also states that "advantage was taken of the loss of a fort more immediately guarding the neighboring town of Alexandria to place the town within the range of a naval force," and that thereupon the inhabitants of the town "had inconsiderately cast themselves upon the justice and generosity of the victor." There are two indirect assertions here, both of which are incorrect. First, that the fort referred to was sufficient to have prevented the ascent of the British squadron to Alexandria; and, secondly, that although the town was thus brought "within the range of a naval force," the inhabitants were not compelled to "cast themselves upon the justice and generosity of

the victor," and therefore were inconsiderate in doing so. We shall presently examine more particularly into the truth of these assertions. The object of them was to prejudice and forestall public opinion in a matter where the administration was particularly liable to censure for its neglect. The first suggestions of General Winder, in a letter addressed to the Secretary of War on the 19th of August, the day on which the news of the landing at Benedict was received, were, that vessels should be sunk in the Potomac at Fort Washington to obstruct the navigation, and that the garrison should be re-enforced; but neither was done.

The over-anxiety of the administration to relieve themselves from censure is in itself an evidence of their consciousness of having deserved it. If they had been conscious of having done their duty to their country in the first instance, and selected a commanding general exclusively on the ground of his fitness, and complied with his reasonable demands so far as they had the power, there would have been no necessity for their showing any extraordinary anxiety as to the result. They might have gone to bed and slept soundly, or, at all events, have maintained a decent composure, without fearing that the nation would rebuke them for not rendering military services either as vedettes, aides-de-camp, or instructors in strategy and tactics. But believing or fearing that they had committed one great error, and alarmed at the impending consequences, they lost their self-possession, and were hurried into a still greater mistake, which rendered the catastrophe inevitable. By incessant interference in the most delicate and important duties of the commanding general, they

paralyzed his powers, but, at the same time, relieved him from all responsibility and assumed it themselves. When the time came for the people to inquire who was answerable for the stigma cast upon the nation, they had no alternative but a frank confession of neglect of duty on their part, or a resort to evasion, leaving the blame to fall on others. Hence the unjust innuendoes in the proclamation and the whitewashing report of the Congressional committee of investigation, the intention of both of which was to convey the impression that no blame for the disaster at Bladensburg could rest any where but on the people themselves, the troops, and subordinate officers. To assist in fixing this impression on the public mind, and to show the indignation of the government at any man who could, "on or about the 27th of August, when the enemy was approaching, run away," the officer who had run away with his command from Fort Washington—a post which the commanding general had pronounced not tenable—was tried by a court-martial and dismissed from the service: a sort of vicarious atonement, or sacrifice on the altar of public opinion, to purge away the sins of those who were the first to instill a panic into the people and troops, and to set the example of running away "when the enemy was approaching" Bladensburg.

CHAPTER XIV.

Proceedings of the Enemy in the City.

THE proclamation of the President to which we have referred states that, though the enemy held possession of the capital "for a single day only, they wantonly destroyed the public edifices, having no relation in their structure to operations of war, nor used at the time for military annoyance, some of these edifices being also costly monuments of taste and of the arts, and others depositories of the public archives, not only precious to the nation as the memorials of its origin and its early transactions, but interesting to all nations as contributions to the general stock of historical instruction and political science."

This is a true bill. The use made by Ross and Cockburn of their victory brought more disgrace upon their government than the defeat at Bladensburg did upon our own, and the President and cabinet had some reason to be thankful that indignation against the common enemy caused their own agency in bringing about the disaster to be less carefully scrutinized. The news of the capture of Washington was received in London with exultation, and the park and Tower guns were fired three days successively; but when the details of the capture became known, it was found that there was less cause for exultation than for shame. The London Statesman compared the doings of Ross and Cockburn with the conduct of the buccaneers and "fillibusters"

of old. "Willingly," it said, "would we throw a veil of oblivion over our transactions at Washington. The Cossacks spared Paris, but we spared not the capital of America."* The Liverpool Mercury judiciously remarked, "There are few of our readers but who will form their own comments on the capture and destruction of the seat of government of the United States of America, and to their own comments we shall therefore, on this particular occasion, leave them. We love the true glory, the true honor of our country; and therefore, while we applaud the spirit and intrepidity of our seamen and soldiers who were the brave instruments of this successful enterprise, we shall add nothing at present to the sentiments which we have frequently and recently expressed on the justice and policy of such warfare. We will content ourselves with asking the most earnest friends of the conflagratory system what purpose will be served by the flames of the Senate House at Washington? If the people of the United States retain any portion of that spirit with which they successfully contended for their independence, the effect of those flames will not easily be extinguished."

The British Annual Register for 1814 denounced the proceedings of Ross and Cockburn as a return to "the times of barbarism," and said, "It can not be concealed that the extent of devastation practiced by the victors brought a heavy censure upon the British character, not only in America, but on the Continent of Europe."

Any shrewd, clear-headed observer, who had watch-

* Niles's Register, vol. vii., p. 204, 275.

ed the British troops on their march to Washington, would have inferred, from the fact that they traveled without any other baggage than what they had on their backs, that they did not intend to make a protracted visit. But the government authorities seem to have been filled with the gloomiest anticipations. The Secretary of the Navy, as it appears from his letter to the committee, dated October 3d, took it for granted that the enemy would remain long enough "to launch the new frigate," which would require "four or five days," and that he would "in the mean time greatly extend the field of his plunder and devastation."

Ross and Cockburn, knowing that they could spare but "a single day only," would have had some difficulty in that short time in dispatching any great amount of business, even in the way of destruction, which does not require much forethought or ingenuity; and they would have had no leisure left to visit the curiosities and lions, in the shape of living statesmen of note, who might be found in and about the metropolis. The population of the city was then very inconsiderable, and the houses few in number; but it was and always will be a "city of magnificent distances," comprising within its corporate limits distinct settlements so remote from each other that in other quarters of the world they might be considered as entitled to the privilege of a separate dialect, and each of these distinct settlements contained public buildings, which, under the new reading of public law, it was the duty of the victors to destroy. To accomplish this in the space of one working day might have been found impracticable without assistance, but this they obtained

from the quarter where they would least of all have looked for it. They little imagined that America could boast of her Rostopchins, though they were on but a small scale; and no doubt they were as much pleased as surprised to find how much labor had been spared them.

The Secretary of the Navy, in the letter to which we last referred, enters into an elaborate exposition of the reasons which induced the order given by him, under the President's direction, for the destruction of the navy-yard and its contents. But this exposition would not have been necessary if the proceeding had not been one of a character to shock the common sense of the community, and to appear ridiculous to those who were not under the influence of the panic. It seems, from the report of Commodore Tingey, the commandant of the yard, that not only his principal officer, Captain Creighton, was "extremely averse" to the execution of the order, and "several individuals came in succession" to beg him to deviate from his instructions, but, the commodore continues,

"A deputation also of the most respectable women came on the same errand, when I found myself painfully necessitated to inform them that any further importunities would cause the matches to be instantly applied to the trains, with assurance, however, that, if left at peace, I would delay the execution of the orders as long as I could feel the least shadow of justification."

This is precisely the answer which Cockburn would have given himself. The commodore was firmer or tougher than Coriolanus at the gates of Rome, before

his weeping mother and attendant ladies, when there was "no more mercy in him than there is milk in a male tiger;" for although the ladies, whose attachment to the yard carried them to such lengths, did desist from their importunities and leave him "at peace," yet at last, he says, "the matches were applied, and in a few minutes the whole was in a state of irretrievable conflagration."

But the commodore is inaccurate, even according to his own showing, in stating that "the whole was in a state of irretrievable conflagration." He says, in his report of October 18th,

"From a momentary impulse and faint hope of recovering the new schooner Lynx, I directed her not to be fired, and have the satisfaction to say that, by an almost miraculous escape, she is still 'ours.'"

A miraculous escape it was, from two successive bands of lynx-eyed incendiaries, foreign and domestic, vying with each in the work of conflagration. But probably the enemy, on his arrival at the yard, finding that his job was otherwise so neatly finished to his hands, was cheated into a belief that the Lynx was built of incombustible materials.

The commodore seems to claim a credit for this miraculous escape of the Lynx akin to the glory which the gallant Perry won by his victory on Lake Erie, for the word "ours" is evidently quoted from the celebrated dispatch announcing that victory. Yet, instead of being permitted to boast of this exploit, as he does, in a letter addressed to the Secretary of the Navy, according to the principles laid down by the latter, the commodore should have been tried by a court-martial.

The secretary, in the course of his justification of the burning of the yard, says: "The commandant of the navy-yard is a captain in the navy; the vessels and property were under his charge and command; and if no special order from the department had been issued, and he had suffered the public shipping and property to have fallen into the hands of the enemy, he would have committed a high military crime, for which he would have been amenable before a court-martial." Commodore Tingey, in failing to set fire to the Lynx, not only committed this "high military crime," but aggravated it by disobeying a special order. Yet, instead of being brought before a court-martial, he was not even rebuked; and, no doubt, if all the public property at the yard had escaped in the same miraculous manner—by "a momentary impulse" of good sense on the part of the administration—instead of laboring to prove that "a high military crime" had been committed, they would have been prompt to claim credit for their prudence and foresight.

Ross could hardly have been ignorant that the navy-yard was destroyed by our own officials, for, as he entered the city about eight o'clock at night, and the matches were applied, according to Commodore Tingey's report, at half past eight, the light of such an extensive conflagration must have attracted his attention and caused inquiry. Yet he claims the exploit as his own. In his official dispatch, after a brief account of the battle, he says:

"Having halted the army for a short time, I determined to march upon Washington, and reached that city at eight o'clock. Judging it of consequence to com-

plete the destruction of the public buildings with the least possible delay, so that the army might retire without loss of time, the following buildings were set fire to and consumed: the Capitol, including the Senate-House and House of Representatives, the arsenal, the dock-yard [navy-yard], treasury, war office, President's palace, rope-walk, and the great bridge across the Potomac. In the dock-yard, a frigate nearly ready to be launched, and a sloop of war, were consumed. The two bridges leading to Washington over the Eastern Branch had been destroyed by the enemy, who apprehended an attack from that quarter. The object of the expedition being accomplished, I determined, before any greater force of the enemy could be assembled, to withdraw the troops, and accordingly commenced retiring on the night of the 25th."

It is evident, from Ross's confession of his anxiety to get away "with the least possible delay," that he must have felt very uneasy while in the city, and that it would not have required much to increase his apprehension to such an extent as to communicate to him a little of the panic which he had occasioned among others, and disincline him to incur a "loss of time" by waiting to set fire to any thing. But the conflagration at the navy-yard, as indicating the state of feeling which existed, probably encouraged him.

The burning of the lower bridge over the Eastern Branch, where the military council had been held in the morning, took place after the retreat of our troops to the city, and before the British entered it. What the object of its destruction was it is difficult to imagine. The enemy would have had no occasion to

use it, and would not have carried it away as a trophy. But as all the materials had been got ready in the morning, both to burn and blow it up, it was probably destroyed on the same principle which has induced some thrifty housewives, after a fit of sickness in the family, to swallow the medicine which was left, in order to save money and prevent waste.

Ross unduly claims credit for destroying "the great bridge over the Potomac." The glory of this achievement must be divided. It appears, from the report made to the committee of investigation from the Ordnance Department, that a non-commissioned officer, commanding a guard of our troops posted on the Virginia side of the bridge, "perceiving a body of the British ready to pass over, concluded the surest and best method to prevent it was to destroy, by fire, that end and part where he was posted, and that the other end, on the Washington side, was fired by the enemy." The British could have had no intention, pressed as they were for time, to cross a bridge a mile in length; but the "Subaltern in America" states that they were expecting an attack from "a large American force" which showed itself "on the opposite bank of the Potomac." The destruction of the bridge, therefore, including a quantity of military stores at the Virginia end, was probably the strange result of mutual panic. Each party descried an army of men in buckram at the other end, and "blazed away" at the bridge.

Among the "public buildings" which Ross enumerates as having been destroyed is a "rope-walk." There was no public or government building of that description, as he probably knew, for the National In-

telligencer of August 31, 1814, says: "The enemy was conducted through the city by a former resident, who, with other detected traitors, is now in confinement." The same paper states that "the rope-walks of Tench Ringgold, Heath & Co., and John Chalmers, were destroyed by fire, without any pretence being assigned therefor that we know of." Men engaged in such deeds do not trouble themselves much in hunting for or assigning pretences. Their reasons for the destruction of the rope-walks were, perhaps, an instinctive antipathy to hemp, and lively recollection of a particular use to which rope is sometimes applied. They might, in their own minds, have justified the destruction on the ground of self-defence, and that they would, at some future time, stand in danger of their lives from the kind of article there manufactured.

According to the report of the committee of investigation, the danger done to the public by the destruction of the navy-yard, Capitol, President's house, and other public buildings, amounted to a little more than a million of dollars, more than one half of it consisting of the damage done by the destruction of the navy-yard and its contents, including the new frigate Columbia. The sloop-of-war Argus, lying in the stream at the navy-yard, if manned by Barney's seamen, might have been saved, or even used as a battery to protect the yard; but the panic which prevailed appeared to have destroyed all powers of reasoning or forethought.

The value of the Congress library, destroyed with the Capitol, was not estimated by the committee. It was not a very valuable collection; but Ross and Cock-

burn, on this occasion, wanted only the opportunity to render themselves even more infamously renowned than the barbarian calif who burned the Alexandrian library, for he had at least the excuse of not knowing the value of what he destroyed. Their hostility to literature was shown also in another way, by the destruction of the types and furniture of the office of the National Intelligencer, for which they had the excuse of the able and effective support which that paper gave to the administration and the war. It was a high compliment paid to the editors of that paper, though, no doubt, one which they would cheerfully have dispensed with.

The following account of the attack of his majesty's forces upon the office of the National Intelligencer is derived from an authentic source:

"When it became known that the British forces had landed at Benedict, on the Patuxent, with the probable design of advancing upon the seat of government, fifty miles distant, a levy *en masse* of the District militia was ordered by the government, and this included all the workmen employed in the office of the National Intelligencer newspaper. The sudden withdrawal of these men from their business would, of course, have caused the immediate suspension of the paper, and cut off from the country the only source of regular information from Washington of the deeply-interesting events which impended. To prevent this evil, one of the editors of the paper (the other had been absent some weeks with his family on a visit to his parental home in the South) stated the case to the Secretary of War, who immediately directed that a sufficient

number of the workmen should be relieved from military duty temporarily, and furloughed for their regular occupation in the printing-office. Thus the paper continued to be issued as usual, daily, up to the morning of the 24th of August, although the men were, during the whole time, very restive at being kept from their friends and comrades in the field, and only consented to continue at their duty by the reiterated promise of the proprietor that, as soon as it should be ascertained that the enemy were approaching the city, he and they would all leave the office, and go and join their respective companies.

"On the morning of the 24th the paper was got ready and put to press about 2 o clock, and the editor retired to his residence and went to bed. About 3 o'clock he was awakened by a messenger from the printing-office, and informed that the Post-office was shut up and abandoned, every thing removed, nobody there to receive the papers or attend to any thing, and the mails discontinued. Soon after daybreak the editor rose and repaired to the office, where, having summoned the workmen, he informed them that, the mails having stopped and cut off communication beyond the city, it was useless to persevere in publishing the paper, therefore he should forthwith leave home to join his company (Davidson's infantry) on the eastern branch of the Potomac, and left them free to repair also to their companies, which they did. The Intelligencer of that morning contained an article on the probable intentions of the enemy, which closed with this prophetic sentence: 'In a few hours we believe the enemy's object will be developed and the issue determined.'

"The British forces entered Washington that evening, and bivouacked on the Capitol Hill. The next day, Admiral Cockburn, in his progress through the city (by the way of Pennsylvania Avenue, which was then the only regular or used street or road from one part of the city to the other), halted in front of the office of the National Intelligencer, attended by a body of sailors and soldiers. The National Intelligencer, then the confidential journal of Mr. Madison's administration, and a warm advocate of the war, was conducted by two gentlemen, one of whom, the senior editor, Mr. Gales, was a native of England, though removed to the United States with his parents in childhood.

"The zeal of the Intelligencer in support of the war, coupled with the fact that one of its editors was by birth an Englishman, had exasperated Admiral Cockburn violently against the journal and its proprietor, and being unable to capture the obnoxious editor (who was still in North Carolina with his family), he determined to burn down the printing-office and its contents, which purpose, however, he was prevented from executing by the entreaties of the females of the contiguous houses, which would have been consumed with the office building (the men of the families being absent with the troops). But the admiral vented his spleen on the printing materials and other property in the building. He had the library, of several hundred volumes, removed to the street (assisting himself in the work) and burned, threw all the types and printing materials out of the upper windows, and broke and destroyed all the presses, thereby inflicting a loss on

the proprietors of some thousands of dollars, and then departed."

It was the destruction of the *public* buildings at Washington by the enemy which occasioned the indignant comments of the press both in Great Britain and on the Continent. But private property also, to a large amount, was destroyed, a fact which Ross very naturally omitted to state in his public dispatches.

The National Intelligencer of August 31, 1814, says:

"When we remarked in our paper of yesterday that private property had, in general, been scrupulously respected by the enemy during his late incursion, we spoke what we believed from a hasty survey, and perhaps without sufficient inquiry. Greater respect was certainly paid to private property than has usually been exhibited by the enemy in his marauding parties. No houses were half as much *plundered* by the enemy as by the knavish wretches about the town who profited by the general distress. There were, however, several private buildings wantonly destroyed, and some of those persons who remained in the city were scandalously maltreated. Among the private buildings destroyed was the dwelling-house owned and occupied by Mr. Robert Sewall (formerly rented by Mr. Gallatin), from behind which a gun was fired at General Ross, which killed the horse he rode. The houses built for General Washington on the brow of Capitol Hill, the large hotel belonging to Daniel Carroll, of Duddington, and others, and recently occupied by Mr. Tomlinson; the rope-walks of Tench Ringgold, Heath & Co., and John Chalmers, were destroyed by fire, without any pretence being assigned therefor that we know of."

One of the least creditable acts committed by the enemy during his stay in the city was the mutilation of the monument which now stands opposite the west front of the Capitol, and which had been erected at the navy-yard by private subscriptions of officers of the navy, to commemorate their comrades who were killed in the war with Tripoli. There was nothing in this monument which could offend the national pride of Englishmen, except so far as it brought to their recollection the gallantry of our naval heroes. There could, therefore, have been no other than a malicious motive for the defacement of it. A correspondent of the National Intelligencer, writing shortly after the event, gives the following account of it:

"This elegant monument of the liberality and gallantry of our naval heroes has been shamefully defaced by the hand of some barbarian. On the base, the Genius of America is represented by a female figure pointing to an inscription and raising a view of the battle before Tripoli, instructing her children who are standing beside her. The pointing finger and thumb have been cut off. History—a female figure, who is represented as recording the event—has been robbed of her pen; and a figure of Fame, who is represented as descending in a cloud, covering the deeds of her sons with the palm and crown of glory, has been robbed of the palm at the expense of the hand that held it. From every inquiry it is possible to make, there is no reason to doubt but that it was the deliberate act of some of the British officers, as several of them were seen to be on the base of the monument by the neighbors around the yard."

In the course of their operations the British met with a singular accident, the horrible consequences of which probably made them exceedingly cautious in their subsequent explorations through the city. At Greenleaf's Point there was an arsenal, with one or two other public buildings, which, with their contents, had been partially destroyed by our own people before abandoning them. In the hope of saving the powder, a large quantity of it, in kegs, was concealed in a dry well near the barracks. On the day after the capture of the city, a party of 200 British soldiers, with several officers, was sent down to the Point to complete the destruction of what might be found there; and one of these officers, in a letter which was published in a London newspaper,* gives the following account:

"One of the artillery-men most unfortunately dropped a lighted port-fire into the well, which, with a magazine about twelve yards distant, full of shells, charged and primed, blew up with the most tremendous explosion I ever heard. One house was unroofed, and the walls of two others, which had been burnt an hour before, were shook down. Large pieces of earth, stones, bricks, shot, shells, etc., burst into the air, and, falling among us (who had nowhere to run, being on a narrow neck of land, with the sea [Rivers Potomac and Eastern Branch] on three sides), killed about twelve men and wounded above thirty more, most of them in a dreadful manner. I had the good fortune to escape with whole skin and bones, but somewhat bruised. The groans of the people almost buried in the earth, or with legs and arms broke, and the

* Niles's Register, vol. vii., Supplement, p. 150.

sight of pieces of bodies lying about, was a thousand times more distressing than the loss we met in the field the day before."

The loss of the British by this accident is believed to be greater than is stated by the writer of the foregoing letter. On the day succeeding the occurrence, the author of this volume, as brigade inspector, visited the place, and witnessed the horrible spectacle of legs, arms, and heads protruding from the mounds of earth thrown up by the explosion. The buildings destroyed were of little value.

Among the boasted exploits of the British in the city was that of enjoying a feast in the President's house, at the expense of Mr. Madison, before they set fire to the building. A letter from one of their midshipmen, published in a London paper,* says, "When the general entered Mr. Madison's house in the capital, he found the table spread for dinner, and all the fruits and wines in cool. The officers regaled themselves with whatever they wanted, and then set fire to the house." Another account says that this alleged banquet was on a collation which Mr. Madison had directed to be prepared for the principal officers of government and of the army, when they should return from the expected victory at Bladensburg, which would have given the wines ample time to cool. But, in point of fact, it is believed that the British found no banquet at the President's house, save such refreshments as were kept in readiness for the messengers and officers returning from errands or calling on duty, day or night.

* Niles's Register, *ut supra*.

Cockburn made himself quite at home in the city, exhibiting in the streets a gross levity of manner, displaying sundry articles of trifling value which he had taken from the President's house, and repeating many of the coarse jests and reproaches of the Federal Republican respecting the chief magistrate. He rode about the city upon a mare with her colt trotting after her, which he would not allow to be disturbed.

Ross, it appears, was an Irishman by birth. Armstrong, in his "Notices," calls him "a dashing Irish general, who had acquired his morals, as well as his tactics, in the Spanish war." He is said to have been more courteous and mild in his deportment than Cockburn, notwithstanding the pretended faith of the latter in Chesterfield. But Ross was the chief of the expedition, and, as justly remarked by Niles in his Register,* "Why, then, should the conflagration be charged to Cockburn? In a homely proverb, *exactly* suited to this occasion, 'Give the devil his due.' Ross made the burning a subject of boasting." The difference in the manners of the two was probably the usual difference between officers of the navy and army in the British service; and Cockburn, as the sailor, may have been the more frank and generous of the two, notwithstanding his rudeness of manner.

The manner of the British retreat from the city, as it is described by the author of "The Subaltern in America," was as cautious, and stealthy, and precipitate as was natural for a retreating army under such circumstances. He says:

* Vol. vii., Supplement, p. 157.

"In the mean while, the officers of the different corps had been directed, in a whisper, to make ready for falling back as soon as darkness should set in. From the men, however, the thing was kept profoundly secret. They were given, indeed, to understand that an important manœuvre would be effected before to-morrow morning, but the hints thrown out tended to induce an expectation of a further advance rather than of a retreat. A similar rumor was permitted quietly to circulate among the inhabitants, with the view, doubtless, of its making its way into the American camp; while all persons were required, on pain of death, to keep within doors from sunset to sunrise. This done, as many horses as could be got together were put in requisition for the transport of the artillery. Even the few wounded officers who had accompanied the column were required to resign theirs, and mine, among the number, was taken away. But the precaution was a very just and proper one. Not only were the guns, by this means, rendered more portable, but the danger of a betrayal from a neigh, or the trampling of hooves along the paved streets, was provided against; and though individuals might and did suffer, their sufferings were not to be put into the scale against the public good.

"It was about eight o'clock at night when a staff-officer, arriving upon the ground, gave direction for the corps to form in marching order. Preparatory to this step, large quantities of fresh fuel were heaped upon the fires, while from every company a few men were selected who should remain beside them till the pickets withdrew, and move from time to time about, so

as that their figures might be seen by the light of the blaze. After this, the troops stole to the rear of the fires by twos and threes; when far enough removed to avoid observation, they took their places, and, in profound silence, began their march. The night was very dark. Stars there were, indeed, in the sky, but, for some time after quitting the light of the bivouac, their influence was wholly unfelt. We moved on, however, in good order. No man spoke above his breath, our very steps were planted lightly, and we cleared the town without exciting observation."

This mode of getting away from a conquest was deficient in melodramatic dignity, it is true, but it showed the old soldier; for Ross, having accomplished the object of his expedition, had nothing further to desire than to retreat quickly and unmolestedly to the shipping, and this he could not have been so likely to do if he had announced and signalized his departure by a blowing of trumpets, beating of drums, and other noise, and "pomp and circumstance of glorious war."

From the description of Surgeon Catlett, the appearance of the enemy on his retreat must have been rather forlorn than martial. He says:

"They appeared to be preparing to move; had about forty miserable-looking horses haltered up, ten or twelve carts and wagons, one ox-cart, one coachee, and several gigs, which the officers were industriously assisting to tackle up, and which were immediately sent on to Bladensburg to move off their wounded. A drove of sixty or seventy cattle preceded this cavalcade. On our arrival at Bladensburg, the surgeons were ordered to select all the wounded who could walk

(those with broken arms and the like), and send them off immediately. The forty horses were mounted with such as could ride, the carts and wagons loaded, and ninety odd wounded left behind."

The National Intelligencer of August 31 and September 1, 1814, states that "the enemy did not bury their dead, except those in the immediate vicinity of their camp. The rest, in number near two hundred, were buried by a committee of our own citizens sent out for the purpose;" and that "the loss of the enemy, before he regained his ships, probably exceeded a thousand men. He lost at least two hundred killed in the battle and by explosion, and three or four hundred wounded. Many died of fatigue, numbers were taken prisoners by the cavalry hanging on his rear, and not a few deserted."

The enemy occupied four days in their retreat to Benedict, which they reached on the evening of the 29th of August, and re-embarked the following day. Cockburn states in his dispatch that they reached Upper Marlborough on the evening of the 26th, "without molestation of any sort—indeed, without a single musket being fired." Their army remained the whole day of the 28th at Nottingham, while the crews of their boats were engaged in removing the plunder.

This chapter, in which we have hastily, and perhaps with somewhat of an impatient spirit, reviewed scenes which left no pleasant impress upon our memory, the reader will probably thank us for bringing to a close with the following interesting communication from the Hon. Richard Rush, of Pennsylvania, whose name has been so frequently mentioned in

these pages. Its intrinsic claims to attention, as the reminiscences of an intelligent contemporary and witness of the occurrences to which it refers, are greatly enhanced by the fact that the venerable writer is now the sole survivor of Mr. Madison's cabinet; that his position, therefore, was such as to give him peculiar opportunities of being thoroughly informed, and that his character, independently of position, was then, as it is now, such as to command respect for every thing emanating from his pen.

"Sydenham, near Philadelphia, 10th July, 1855.

"MY DEAR SIR,—Having made a simple acknowledgment of your letter of the 26th of June, I now proceed to give you what information I can.

"In preparing a history of the 'Invasion and Capture of Washington,' you propose to yourself a meritorious task, and I regret that I have preserved no notes or memorandums on the subject. It is but little I can say that is likely to be of interest to you, as the story is an old one, and I shall be the more distrustful of this little, as there must necessarily be chasms in my memory after the lapse of forty years. I have, indeed, to this hour, the vivid impression upon my eye of columns of flame and smoke ascending throughout the night of the 24th of August from the Capitol, President's house, and other public edifices, as the whole were on fire, some burning slowly, others with bursts of flame and sparks mounting high up in the dark horizon. This never can be forgotten by me, as I accompanied out of the city on that memorable night in 1814, President Madison, Mr. Jones, then Sec-

retary of the Navy, General Mason, of Annaloston Island, Mr. Charles Carroll, of Bellevue, and Mr. Tench Ringgold. There were no others of our group that I remember.

"If at intervals the dismal sight was lost to our view, we got it again from some hill-top or eminence where we paused to look at it. We were on horseback, attended by servants, proceeding on the Virginia side of the Potomac, which we crossed at the Little Falls, intending to recross at the Great Falls that night or the next morning, so as to be again on the Maryland side, and return to Washington as the movements of the enemy and our own strength might prompt.

"Mr. Monroe, Secretary of State, was active in his steps that night and next day in rousing, by suitable appeals, the people of the surrounding country. There had not been so vehement and united a feeling against the enemy since the war began, as his defeats at Baltimore, New Orleans, and elsewhere soon and signally attested. Stung by the disaster of the morning, and shocked at the conflagration we beheld, the first object of the government was to assemble such a force from the neighboring country, known to be populous, although Washington and its immediate vicinity at that epoch were not, as not merely to overmatch him fully should another encounter take place, but cut off his retreat to his ships. This, it was believed, could be done. It was certainly the intention. Its execution was prevented by the whole invading force hurrying off on the night of the 25th of August, leaving a good portion of their slain for us to bury, and of their wounded to our care.

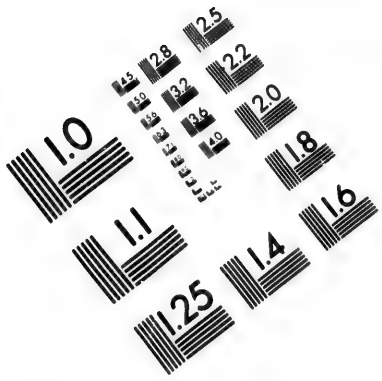
"These duties were performed as humanity dictated, notwithstanding our fresh memory of the wholesale burning of our public edifices of costly and noble structure, containing the national archives, libraries, historical memorials—some not to be replaced—models of ingenuity and art—for even the Patent Office was not spared—and when not a single article of a warlike nature was to be seen or found in any of these edifices. To say that this was retaliation for what was alleged to have been done by us in Upper Canada at an earlier day of the war was without foundation. Besides our disavowal at that time of any intention of destroying the inconsiderable buildings (I am not sure if more than one was destroyed) devoted to civil purposes, and the proffer of reparation which our government immediately made, the governor of Upper Canada, in an official paper of the February which preceded the great conflagration at Washington, acknowledged that the measure of retaliation for all previously reputed misconduct of the American troops in Canada was then complete, the British having burned to the ground the town of Buffalo, opposite the Canadian frontier. No charge of any subsequent devastation on our side contrary to the rules of civilized warfare had been made or pretended.

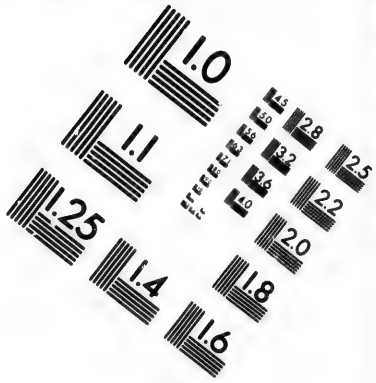
"I summon up no useless recollections in having said thus much as introductory to answering your special inquiries. The memory of the burning of Washington can not be obliterated. The subject is inseparable from great international principles and usages. It never can be thought of by an American, and ought not to be thought of by an enlightened Englishman, but

in conjunction with the deplorable and reprehensible scenes I recall. It was no trophy of war for a great nation. History can not so record it. Our infant metropolis at that time had the aspect of merely a straggling village but for the size and beauty of its public buildings. Its scattered population scarcely numbered eight thousand; it had no fortresses or sign of any; not a cannon was mounted. The military force assembled for its defence against the sudden incursion of bodies of trained veterans was composed almost entirely of militia hastily got together, some coming in for the first time on the morning of the attack, the greatest portion reaching the ground only when the foe was in sight, and the whole relatively strangers to each other when the fight commenced.

"Your first inquiry, or, rather, expression of belief, is that, on the day before the invasion, I accompanied the President to the camp at 'Battalion Old Fields,' between Washington and the Patuxent. In this you are right. I went in company with the Secretary of the Navy, General Mason, Major Carroll, and Mr. Ringgold; no others that I recollect, although we met with others on our way who were on the look-out for the enemy. The Secretary of War, General Armstrong, did not accompany us, but was at the camp, I believe, when we arrived.

"We learned that the enemy was supposed to be advancing upon the camp, and the force was drawn up waiting his approach. Commodore Barney was there with his sailors and cannon, having blown up his flotilla on the Patuxent to avoid capture by a greatly superior force in boats from the British fleet, which had





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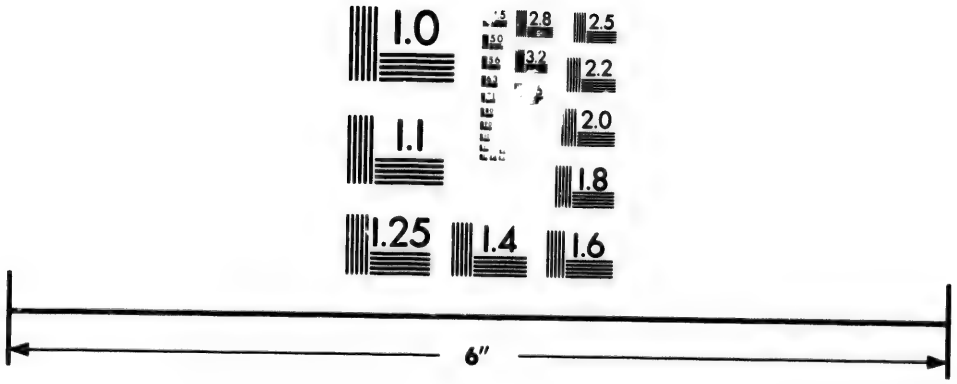

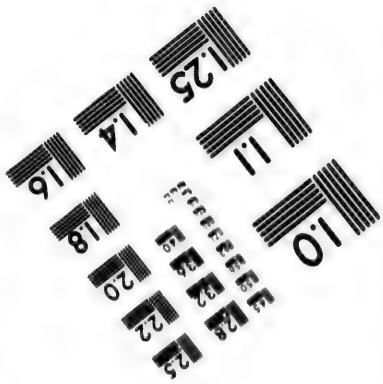

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ascended that river. The enemy did not approach, however, and our men left their encampment that evening, marching back to Washington, which they re-entered by the bridge at the navy-yard in the course of the night. I returned with the President and the others of our party, getting back to Washington by the Bladensburg road an hour or two after midnight.

"Your next supposition is that I was with the President on the field at Bladensburg. In this you are also right. All indications showing that a battle was rapidly coming on, I went early in the morning of the 24th to the President's to get the latest intelligence. Learning that he had gone to the navy-yard, I followed, and found him there with the Secretary of the Navy and several gentlemen, whose names I did not know or can not now recall; but I distinctly remember the presence of Commodore Barney.

"Accounts had come that the enemy was advancing in great force, but whether to enter Washington by Bladensburg or by the bridge at the navy-yard was still unknown. All were anxiously waiting information from the scouts who were coming in in quick succession. The road forked not far from each place, and he might take his choice of either fork. In fact, to keep us longer in the dark, I understood that his whole line, first taking the navy-yard fork, continued in it until the last column got into it. The army then suddenly reversed its front, and marched onward rapidly to Bladensburg. Barney, as I have said, was standing on the ground at the navy-yard, not far from the bridge which brings you into Washington. He made very urgent applications to the Secretary of the Navy

for permission to proceed to Bladensburg as fast as possible with his men and cannon, his opinion being that the attack would begin there.

"The certainty of this at length becoming known, all went to Bladensburg. I accompanied the President and those already with him. When we reached Bladensburg the enemy was in sight, and the firing began almost immediately afterward: their rockets flew over us as we sat on our horses. The Baltimore volunteers and militia, who formed the front line, used their field-pieces—six-pounders, I think—firing only round shot, which struck down but few, however, and used their small arms with great spirit at first; but most of it broke as the enemy came on in increasing numbers after they crossed the small bridge at Bladensburg, intending to rely upon their bayonets.

"The Secretary of War and commanding general were in close view of the front line, as was the President, doing what they could to encourage the resistance. It soon became ineffectual, however, throughout the field, but was resumed by Barney with remarkable gallantry and vigor. Notwithstanding his eagerness to be on the spot, and marching, as he said, "on a trot," he was unable to reach the battle-ground nearer than a couple of miles or thereabouts from Bladensburg, up to which point all resistance had then been overcome, and the field was clear. But there he made a stand with his battery of heavy guns, supported on his right by his seamen acting as soldiers, and a detachment of marines under the gallant Captain (since Colonel) Miller, and on his left by some volunteers of the District of Columbia. This force, the

whole of which was inconsiderable in number but stout in heart, waiting until the close approach of the British regulars, opened upon them such well-directed volleys of grape and musketry as to baffle their repeated efforts to get forward, until, finally, overpowered by numbers and surrounded on all sides—for they sent a force in his rear—Barney was compelled to yield, and fell into their hands while lying prostrate on the ground severely wounded.

"I returned to the city with the President. Mr. Monroe was also on the field doing all he could to prevent the disaster, and urging good counsel for wiping out the stain by another contest before the enemy could escape after his bold and too successful inroad. I was not soon enough or long enough on the field, and had not the opportunities otherwise of observing the precise movements of the troops composing the first line, or to become informed by whom or by whose orders changes of position were made as the enemy approached. This answers your inquiry under this head.

"Your remaining inquiry presupposes that I was present on a subsequent day at the camp of General Walter Smith, on 'Windmill Hill,' in company with the President, General Mason, and Major Carroll, when General Armstrong rode into the camp, and the incidents occurred which you mention. I have no recollection of having been there on that occasion, though I heard of what passed, seeing the President nearly every day; but, not witnessing it, I could not attempt, at this remote period, to speak of it.

"This closes as much as I have to impart under

your letter. Accept the little it amounts to as my willing contribution to your call, and with it my respectful and cordial salutations.

"RICHARD RUSH.

"Colonel J. S. Williams, Washington."

CHAPTER XV.

The Capitulation of Alexandria.

It might have been supposed that the administration would find some difficulty in producing the impression that the success of the enemy, in his invasion, was owing chiefly to the pusillanimity of the troops or of the people. Pusillanimity will hardly be admitted to be either a national characteristic, or one belonging to the people of Virginia and Maryland, and there were but few natives of other states then residing in the District of Columbia. Both before and after the battle of Bladensburg, at Craney Island and at Baltimore, the people of Virginia and Maryland proved that they had lost none of the gallantry which distinguished them in the Revolutionary war. Why, then, should there have been such a remarkable exhibition of pusillanimity in the District, which was peculiarly under the guardianship of the general government, and the people of which were pre-eminently blessed in having immediately before their eyes such resplendent examples of more than Roman fortitude, patriotism, and utter disregard of selfish considerations?

But politicians in a free country are seldom deficient in that cunning knowledge of human nature, which, for a time, answers all the purposes of wisdom; and the administration knew that popular favor, though capricious and apt to be misplaced, is thorough-going while it lasts, and, like woman's love, is blind to all faults in

the objects of its affections, can reconcile itself to any inconsistencies, swallow any absurdities, and pardon even gross ill usage of itself. They boldly reckoned, therefore, upon the aid of the popular party, so called, to support them in their determination to traduce the people themselves; and when the men whose own pusillanimity had been flagrant and notorious gravely advanced the charge against a portion of the people no more liable to it than any other portion, the accusation was accepted at once as an article of political faith, without any inquiry into the evidence by which it was supported.

The administration had a particular reason for assailing the people of Alexandria, who might have been supposed sufficiently punished by their losses for any pusillanimity which they had exhibited. But the very extent of these losses, which gave them a claim upon the sympathy of the nation, made the administration anxious to arrest that sympathy, lest it should terminate in censure of themselves. The property destroyed in Washington belonged chiefly to the public, so that individuals were very little injured by its destruction, and the enemy was not at all benefited. But the citizens of Alexandria were individually sufferers to a large amount, and the enemy escaped with a valuable booty. Reasons of state, therefore, and the good of party required that the people of Alexandria should be vilified as the authors of their own sufferings, and the cause of the enemy's triumph and gain.

On the 29th of August, the Secretary of the Navy addressed a letter to Commodore Rodgers, then in Baltimore, informing him that "the terms of capitula-

tion for the town of Alexandria are so degrading and humiliating as to excite the indignation of all classes of people." A few days afterward appeared the President's proclamation, in which he states that the people of Alexandria had "inconsiderately cast themselves upon the justice and generosity of the victor." Both the extract of the letter to Commodore Rodgers and the proclamation were published on the 10th of September in Niles's Register, a paper friendly to the administration, the editor of which, in the course of his comments, observed that "the conduct of the Alexandrians was base and pusillanimous, so as to excite rather the contempt than the pity of their countrymen." This was just the impression that the administration desired to create.

The proclamation was astutely worded, so as to insinuate the charge instead of advancing it directly. It states that the enemy took advantage of the loss of a fort "more immediately guarding" the town of Alexandria. More immediately than what? There is nothing in the paper to explain this phraseology, which was, no doubt, purposely left indefinite, in order that ignorant readers might infer that Alexandria had a variety of important defences more or less distant, but that this particular fort was a Gibraltar in the immediate neighborhood of the town.

General Wilkinson, who knew the place well, and was a competent judge of its strength, represents Fort Washington, which is situated about six miles below Alexandria, on the Maryland side of the river, as being "a mere water battery of twelve or fifteen guns, bearing upon the channel in the ascent of the river, but useless

the moment a vessel had passed. This work was seated at the foot of a steep acclivity, from the summit of which the garrison could have been driven out by musketry; but this height was protected by an octagonal block-house, built of brick, and of two stories altitude, which, being calculated against musketry only, could have been knocked down by a twelve-pounder."* This was its condition in July, 1813. On the 25th of July, 1814, just a month before the battle of Bladensburg, the officer in charge of the fort, as it appears from the documents appended to the report of the committee of investigation, reported to General Winder "the defenceless situation" of the post; and at the suggestion of the general, the War Department consulted an engineer on the subject, who reported that "the whole original design was bad, and it is therefore impossible to make a perfect work of it by any alterations." Perfection being unattainable, and the word impossible forcing itself into the military vocabulary in spite of the sneers of the secretary, a desperate effort was made to come as near as practicable to perfection, and accordingly "a couple of hands were ordered" down to the fort to execute the necessary repairs. No doubt they did all that two men could do under the circumstances. On the 19th of August, after the news of the landing at Benedict had been received in Washington, and the British squadron was known to be ascending the Potomac, General Winder addressed a letter to the Secretary of War, in which he suggested that vessels should be sunk in the Potomac at Fort Washington to obstruct the navigation,

* Wilkinson, vol. i., p. 735.

and that the garrison should be re-enforced, but it does not appear that any attention was paid to either suggestion. On the 20th of August, according to the statement of the Secretary of the Navy, General Winder expressed to him the opinion that Fort Washington was not tenable. On the night of General Winder's retreat to the city, after the battle of Bladensburg, he sent directions, he says, to the officer commanding the fort, "in the event of his being taken in the rear of the fort by the enemy, to blow up the fort and retire across the river." Three days after receiving these directions, the officer in command, on the enemy's squadron appearing off the fort, called a council of war, and by their advice abandoned the fort, blowing up the magazine. The garrison, it appears from the official report, did not then exceed sixty men.

Such was the mighty fortress "*more* immediately guarding" the town of Alexandria. What other Gibraltars of a similar description guarded it *less* immediately we have not been able to learn. The "oldest inhabitant" has no recollection of any.

From a memorial addressed to Congress by the citizens of Alexandria, called forth by the abuse lavished upon them by those who were anxious to conciliate the favor of the men in power, it appears that, so far back as May, 1813, the common council of the city had sent a deputation to the President to apprise him of the defenceless state of the town; and the reply which they received was, that their representations would be properly attended to, but that it was "impossible to extend protection to every assailable point of the country." The truth of this remark was unde-

niable, but it was not altogether relevant, as there is a wide difference between the expediency and practicability of protecting all assailable points and protecting important points likely to be assailed. As may be supposed, no results followed from this application. Little or nothing was done toward the defence of the capital itself, and it is therefore not surprising that Alexandria was wholly neglected. The corporation of Alexandria, however, appropriated fifteen hundred dollars out of their own funds to pay for mounting some cannon which were in the town, and which had been in the use of the militia while under the state government.

The memorialists state also that

"In the month of May, 1813, a deputation from Alexandria, Washington, and Georgetown had an interview with the Secretary of War relative to the defenceless situation of the District. The committee did urge that a more sufficient defence might be afforded for the District than then existed. It was particularly urged upon the secretary that the fortifications at Fort Washington, commonly known by the name of Fort Warburton, should be increased. In consequence of this representation, the government sent an engineer to examine the fort, who, on the 28th of May, 1813, reported to the War Department, as the result of his examination, that an additional number of heavy guns at Fort Warburton, and an additional fort in the neighhood, are both to be considered necessary. Notwithstanding the repeated solicitations of the citizens of Alexandria in the year 1813, nothing was done toward its defence except sending an engineer to examine the

fort. In silence did Alexandria submit to this neglect of their safety until the month of July, 1814, when the common council again endeavored to procure an adequate defence. Gentlemen acting under the authority of the corporation in the month of July waited upon the military commander of the 10th District with the view of ascertaining what measures of defence had been taken or were intended to be adopted for the defence of the town of Alexandria and District. The general, who seemed to be anxious to do his duty as far as the means within his control would enable him, stated to those gentlemen the number of militia he expected would join him, and which seemed to be all the defence he calculated upon. This was a species of defence which would certainly be of no use against an attack by water. It is too obvious that the town of Alexandria could not be defended in any other manner than by a proper fort or forts below it, with a competent garrison. The general commanding the 10th Military District visited Alexandria. The mode of defending it from a water attack was pointed out to him. To adopt it required money. This he was not furnished with. This difficulty, however, was removed by the offer of three of the banks in Alexandria to loan the government fifty thousand dollars for the purpose of erecting proper defences for the District, which loan was accepted, and the money paid to the government. No steps were taken toward securing the town from attack by water, but it was left to be defended at the fort by a garrison not exceeding eighty [sixty] men."

But the people of Alexandria were not merely left without any assistance from the general government.

All the means upon which they might have calculated to make even a show of resistance were taken from them, for the purpose of aiding in the defence of the capital. The condition in which they were left, and the immediate causes of the capitulation, are succinctly, and without exaggeration, set forth in the following extract from the narrative unanimously concurred in by the city council, and published by their order a few days after the appearance of the President's proclamation:

"On the 19th of August a levy *en masse* was made of the militia of the town and county of Alexandria, and on the 20th and 21st they were ordered to cross the Potomac, and stationed between Piscataway and Fort Warburton. They took with them all the artillery which had been mounted at the expense of the corporation, except two twelve-pounders, which were left without ammunition, and nearly all the arms belonging to the town. They left no men but the exempts from age and other causes, and a few who had not reported themselves, or had found substitutes, and it is not believed that, after their departure, one hundred effective armed men could have been mustered in town. The two iron twelve-pounders remained until the 25th, when, Alexandria being open to the enemy, then in full possession of Washington, they were removed at some distance from the town by orders received from General Young.

"On the night of the 24th the Alexandria militia were ordered to recross the Potomac; they did so, and were marched through town, without halting, into the country, and without giving information to the author-

ities or inhabitants of the place of their destination; and on the evening of the 27th, when the fleet approached, the municipal authorities of the town knew not where they were. It has since appeared that they were *then* stationed about nineteen miles from town, by the orders of General Winder. It is here proper to state, that General Winder, on the morning of the 24th, informed the members of the committee of vigilance, who waited on him, that he could send no part of the forces with him to Alexandria, but that he had ordered General Young to cross over to Alexandria, if practicable; if not, to fall down the river. The committee of vigilance, on receiving this information, sent boats over to the Maryland shore sufficient in number to bring over the whole of General Young's force at once; but when the boats reached him, he had received orders from the Secretary of War to retain his position, as General Young, in a communication to the mayor, stated.

"The committee of vigilance, despairing of obtaining any assistance from the general government, and having information of the rapid approach of the enemy toward the capital by land, and that their squadron was approaching Alexandria by water, deemed it their duty to recommend to the common council a resolution to the following effect: 'That, in case the British vessels should pass the fort, or their forces approach the town by land, and there should be *no sufficient force*, on our part, to oppose them with any reasonable prospect of success, they should appoint a committee to carry a flag to the officer commanding the enemy's force about to attack the town, and to procure

the best terms for the safety of persons, houses, and property in their power. This recommendation was made on the day of the battle of Bladensburg, and on the same day was unanimously adopted by the common council.

"The battle of Bladensburg having terminated in the defeat of our troops, and General Winder having been obliged to retreat from the capital toward Montgomery Court House, about fifteen miles to the west of it, the City of Washington was left in the entire possession of the enemy. The citizens of Alexandria saw nothing to impede the march of the British to their town; saw nothing to restrain them from committing the most brutal outrages upon the female portion of society, having neither arms nor men to make defence with. The President of the United States and the heads of the departments were absent, and it was not known where they were to be found; no military commander or officer of the general government was present to direct or advise."

The British squadron reached Alexandria on the evening of the 28th of August. It consisted of two frigates, one of 38 and the other of 36 guns; two rocket ships of 18 guns each; two bomb ships of 8 guns each, and a schooner of 2 guns. This force was arranged along the town, a few hundred yards from the wharves, so as to command the place from one extremity to the other, the houses being so situated that they might have been laid in ashes in a few minutes. There was no possible means of defence or resistance; for even if the old men, women, and children, who were left in the town, had wrought themselves up to

the pitch of desperate valor which the administration had established in theory as the proper standard for the times, and resorted to pitchforks, pokers, tongs, and brick-bats, all these would have availed nothing against a bombardment by a naval force. The assertion, therefore, that under these circumstances the inhabitants "cast themselves" upon the mercy of the victor is a deliberate misstatement, for those who uttered it knew well the facts of the case. The inhabitants did not "cast themselves," but were cast upon the mercy of the victor, and not through any fault or neglect of their own, but of those by whom the imputation was originated.

The only question, therefore, is, whether they were inconsiderate in appealing to the clemency of the victor. The mere fact of making terms with a victorious enemy can not be regarded as inconsiderate or disgraceful in itself, except by those chivalrous spirits whose unconquerable valor would prompt them to bury themselves and all that was dear to them in one common grave rather than give any token of defeat or surrender. But this extreme valor, however it may deserve applause, is not exacted by the common sense of mankind. The folly or disgrace of a capitulation, therefore, must depend upon the nature of the terms of it.

The people of Alexandria well knew the character of the warfare which the British had been waging on the shores of the Chesapeake. The proclamation itself adverts to the notorious excesses of the enemy. All that the authorities of Alexandria had in view by a capitulation was to avert from their fellow-townsmen the outrages which had been committed elsewhere.

The object of the leading men of the town was, not to protect the interests of the wealthier classes, for it was their property chiefly which was surrendered by the capitulation, and their families had been or could be easily removed to a safe distance, but to save their poorer fellow-citizens, and their wives and daughters, from the consequences which would have ensued from exposing them to the lust and brutality of drunken seamen.

It would, no doubt, better have suited the purposes of the administration if the scenes of Hampton had been renewed at Alexandria, as the public indignation would then have been concentrated upon the enemy. But the capitulation had the effect of preventing this, and of saving the inhabitants of the town from wanton injury in person or property, while at the same time it gave the enemy no advantages which he would not have enjoyed without it.* Some of the conditions of

* "TERMS OF CAPITULATION *presented by the Commander of the British squadron to the authorities at Alexandria:*

"The town of Alexandria (with the exception of public works) shall not be destroyed, unless hostilities are commenced on the part of the Americans, nor shall the inhabitants be molested in any manner whatever, or their dwelling-houses entered, if the following articles are complied with:

"ARTICLE 1. All naval and ordnance stores (public and private) must be immediately given up.

"ART. 2. Possession will be immediately taken of all the shipping, and their furniture must be sent on board by their owners without delay.

"ART. 3. The vessels which have been sunk must be delivered up in the state they were in on the 19th of August, the day of the squadron passing the Kettle Bottoms.

"ART. 4. Merchandise of every description must be instantly delivered up, and to prevent any irregularities that might be committed

it, which it was impracticable to comply with, were at once waived by the British commander, and the result was, according to the narrative of the council, that "the depredations of the enemy, with a few exceptions, were confined to flour, cotton, and tobacco, which they carried off in some of the vessels then at the town. Only one vessel was burnt; no private dwelling was visited or entered in a rude or hostile manner, nor were citizens personally exposed to insult."

The censure bestowed on the authorities of Alexandria for this capitulation was too manifestly and grossly unjust to meet the concurrence of General Armstrong, imbittered as his feelings were against the people of the District, and liable as he was himself to more or less censure for the defenceless condition of the town. After a brief mention of the occurrence in his "Notices," etc., he says, "It will not be thought extraordinary that, in choosing between total and partial ruin, there should be little, if any hesitation on the

in its embarkation, the merchants have it on their option to load the vessels generally employed for that purpose, when they will be towed off by us.

"ART. 5. All merchandise that has been removed from Alexandria since the 19th instant is to be included in the above articles.

"ART. 6. Refreshments of every description to be supplied the ships, and paid for at the market price by bills on the British government.

"ART. 7. Officers will be appointed to see that the articles Nos. 2, 3, 4, and 5 are strictly complied with, and any deviation or non-compliance on the part of the inhabitants of Alexandria, will render this treaty null and void.

"JAMES A. GORDON,
"Captain of his majesty's ship Sea-Horse."

Of these articles Nos. 3 and 5 were protested against by the authorities of Alexandria, and were not enforced.

part of a defenceless town, the male population of which did not then exceed one hundred combatants.*

After the capitulation of Alexandria, measures were adopted by the government to hurry the departure of the enemy's squadron and annoy it on its passage down the river. A large body of seamen was brought from Baltimore, and placed under the command of Commodores Rodgers, Perry, and Porter, and Captain Creighton, of the Navy. Commodore Rodgers, with boats and fire vessels, attacked and annoyed the rear of the enemy's squadron. Commodore Porter, assisted by Captain Creighton and other naval officers, established a battery at "the White House,"† on the right bank of the Potomac, and Commodore Perry another on the left bank, at a place called "Indian Head." They were both assisted by militia of the District and of Virginia, who behaved well enough to show that, under the lead of men in whom they had confidence, every reliance could be placed on them. Commodore Porter, in his report to the Secretary of the Navy, says, "The intrepidity of Captain Griffith, of the Alexandria artillery, his officers and men, merit the highest eulogiums. They fought their six-pounders until their ammunition was expended, and coolly retired with their guns, when ordered to do so, under a shower of the enemy's shot;" and he further remarks, "The militia who came under my immediate

* Vol. ii., p. 133.

† Since the completion of this work, the author has received an interesting communication from his friend, John S. Gallaher, Esq., late Third Auditor of the U. S. Treasury, who served as a private in a company of Virginia volunteers during the action at the White House. It will be found in the Appendix, No. VI.

notice, and were attached to my command, voluntarily or otherwise, conducted themselves in a manner which reflects on them and their country the highest honor. Many, before the battle, requested to be posted near me, and there was no instance where one offered to retire until I gave the order to retire."

Commodore Perry says of the militia under his command at Indian Head:

"The field-pieces (six-pounders) under the direction of that excellent officer, Major Peter, of the Georgetown, and Captain Burch, of the Washington volunteers, and Captain Lewis, of General Stuart's brigade, kept up a very spirited fire. These officers, together with Captains Stull and Davidson, and their brave men, behaved in the handsomest manner, and rendered all the assistance their limited means afforded.

"The ammunition of the eighteen-pounder and of several of the sixes being expended, and the fire of the enemy from two frigates, two sloops of war, two bombs, one rocket ship, and several smaller vessels, being very heavy, it was thought advisable by General Stuart, Major Peter, and myself, to retire a short distance in the rear. This was done in good order, after sustaining their fire for more than an hour. General Stuart and Colonel Beall were much exposed during the whole time of the cannonading. It would be presumption in me to speak in commendation of these veterans; I can not, however, avoid expressing my admiration of their conduct."*

The amount of damage done to the enemy on his

* These reports will be found in Niles's Register, vol. vii., p. 33, 34, 35.

passage down the river could not be ascertained. Commodore Porter mentions in his report that some of the British ships were much crippled; and a deserter from the Euryalus frigate stated that on board that vessel five were killed and seven wounded on passing the batteries.* There can be no room for doubt that, had Fort Washington been properly garrisoned, and the channel obstructed, or suitable batteries erected at the proper time on the river, the British squadron would never have reached Alexandria.

The District troops, under the command of General Smith, having remained encamped until the departure of the British from the Potomac, were mustered for discharge under the following brigade order:

"Head-quarters, Camp Hill, Oct. 8th, 1814.

"*Brigade Order.*

"It is with great satisfaction that the general announces to the troops of the 1st Columbian Brigade his authority to grant their discharge from their present term of service. Called as they were into the service of their country at an eventful period, they manifested their patriotism by prompt obedience to the call, and, although of force far inferior, boldly threw themselves in front of an approaching powerful foe, checked his progress so far as rested within their limited means, and yielded the way to him only by orders from superior authority. Such, also, was their conduct in the perilous hour of conflict; and although the malignant tongue of envenomed slander has dared for a moment to asperse their fame, the foul calumny will

* Niles's Register, vol. vii., p. 123.

be exposed, and the head of the author covered with that disgrace he so well merits.

"The enemy has not as yet left our shores. He has but retired, and may again assail us. But the government, desirous to grant such relief as it can conveniently authorize, the troops belonging to this District will, with the exception of officers now on a court-martial, be discharged this day. The alacrity with which they have obeyed former orders, and their zeal while in service, are sure pledges that they will be always ready when their country calls.

"By order, J. S. WILLIAMS,
"Brigade-major and Inspector."

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

No. I.

NARRATIVE OF GENERAL WINDER, ADDRESSED TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE OF INVESTIGATION.

O'Neale's, Sept. 26, 1814.

SIR,—The readiest mode in which I can meet the inquiries which you have made, on behalf of the committee of which you are the chairman, will be to give a narrative of my agency as commander of the 10th Military District, and to accompany it with the correspondence which I have had, by letter, with the general and state governments, and their respective officers, while in that command.

Within the few last days of June, and before it was known that my exchange was perfect, although intelligence to that effect was momently expected, I was at the City of Washington, and the Secretary of War informed me that it was in contemplation to create another military district, to embrace the country from Rappahannock northward, to include the State of Maryland, and that the President intended to vest me with the command of it.

On my return to Baltimore I addressed to the Secretary of War copies of the letters herewith transmitted, marked 1 A, 2 A.

About the 4th or 5th of July I received a letter, a copy of which, marked 1 B, accompanies this, which inclosed an order constituting the 10th Military District, a copy of which is annexed to the letter above referred to.

In obedience to the requisition of the letter, I immediately went to Washington and waited on the Secretary of War. He stated to me that, in addition to the garrisons of the several forts within my district, and the detachments of the 36th and 38th infantry then at Benedict, it was contemplated to order a detachment of cavalry, then at Carlisle, under orders to be mounted, amounting to about one hundred and fifty, a company of the 12th, and from

one to two companies of the 10th regular infantry, which would be ordered to be collected from their several recruiting rendezvous, and to march to the City of Washington, and that the whole regular force thus to be collected might amount to one thousand or twelve hundred, and that the balance of my command would be composed of militia; that a requisition was about to be made upon certain states for upward of ninety thousand militia, intended for the defence of the maritime frontier of the country, and showed me a blank circular which had been printed, but not filled up, nor sent to the respective governors of the states.

I took the liberty of suggesting to the Secretary of War at that time my idea of the propriety of calling immediately into the field at least a portion of the militia intended for my district, and encamping them in the best position for protecting the probable points at which the enemy would strike if he should invade the district of my command. The secretary was of opinion that the most advantageous mode of using militia was upon the spur of the occasion, and to bring them to fight as soon as called out. I returned within a day or two to Baltimore to prepare myself for visiting the different parts of my district, and to explore it generally, and particularly those parts of it which might be considered as the approaches to the three principal points of it, to wit, Washington, Baltimore, and Annapolis.

My impressions of the necessity of having a respectable force immediately called into the field were strengthened instead of diminished by subsequent reflection, and I, in consequence, on the 9th of July, addressed the letter to the Secretary of War, a copy of which is herewith sent, marked 3 A.

Agreeably to the suggestion contained in that letter, I proceeded to Annapolis to visit the military posts there, and to be ready on the spot, when the governor should receive the requisition, and myself such instructions as might be thought proper to be given me, to take the most immediate steps to accomplish them.

The governor received the requisition, and immediately issued the necessary orders to have the quota required drafted.

On the 12th of July the secretary addressed to me a letter (the copy of which is herewith marked 2 B), but which, being directed to Baltimore, did not reach me until after I had been to Upper Marlborough and again returned to Annapolis, where it followed

me. I proceeded from Annapolis to Upper Marlborough, and on the 16th addressed two letters to the Secretary of War, of which copies are sent, marked 4 A, 5 A.

The apprehension that the enemy would proceed up the Patuxent and attack the flotilla at Nottingham, in consequence of the re-enforcement he had just received, gaining strength, I proceeded immediately to Nottingham, instead of going to the Wood Yard as I intended. During the 16th we received no information of a movement of the enemy up the river; but on the 17th, about 9 o'clock, Mr. Fitzhugh arrived express from the mouth of the Patuxent, and stated that about twenty barges, several frigates, and some small armed vessels were proceeding up the river. I, in consequence, wrote a letter to the Secretary of War, a copy of which is herewith sent, marked 6 A, and wrote a note to Brigadier-general West, of the Maryland militia, advising him to call out the militia of the county.

I ordered the detachments of the 36th and 38th to hasten from the head of South River, by forced marches, to Nottingham. Three companies of the city militia were promptly dispatched in consequence of my letter of the 17th. But by the time these latter had reached the Wood Yard, and the regulars Marlborough, the enemy had entered Hunting Creek, on the Calvert side of the river, had proceeded to Huntingtown, burned the tobacco warehouse, after having taken off the principal part of the tobacco, and were retiring down the river. I halted the city militia at the Wood Yard, and the regulars at Marlborough.

In answer to my letter of the 17th from Nottingham, I received the following answer from the Secretary of War, marked 3 B. As soon, therefore, as I ascertained that the enemy had retired to the mouth of the Patuxent, I proceeded to Annapolis to make the requisition upon the governor, as directed by the Secretary of War, and thence to Baltimore, to lend my aid and power to draw out the force authorized there.

While at Annapolis, I addressed to the Secretary of War the letter dated 20th of July, a copy of which is sent, marked 7 A, and at the same time made the requisition on the governor, herewith sent, marked 1 C. After remaining at Baltimore a day, and leaving orders to Brigadier-general Stansbury, who had been called on to command the militia to be assembled there, relative to their muster

and inspection, under the laws of Congress, I returned to Marlborough to fix upon an encampment for the militia I had required from the governor, and to be more at hand to be informed of the enemy's movements. From Upper Marlborough, on the 23d of July, I wrote to the Secretary of War the accompanying letter, marked 8 A, and then proceeded to the Wood Yard, from whence, on the same day, I wrote to the Secretary of War the following letter, marked 9 A.

The enemy still remaining inactive, or, rather, confining himself to depredations upon the lower parts of the rivers Patuxent and Potomac, I seized the opportunity of visiting Fort Washington, and on the 25th required from Lieutenant Edwards, the commanding officer, a representation of what he deemed necessary to complete the equipment of the fort, with its then works, and received from him a representation, which I inclosed in a letter to the Secretary of War on the 25th, of which copies are sent, marked 10 A. A copy of his answer, marked 4 B, is herewith sent.

Learning that some of the enemy's ships were proceeding up the Potomac, I proceeded down to Port Tobacco with a view of ascertaining more precisely his views, and of informing myself of the country, and on the 26th wrote the Secretary of War the following letter, marked 11 A.

Having ascertained the next morning that the enemy's ships had descended the river, I returned to Marlborough, and availed myself of the first opportunity I had to review and inspect the detachment of the 36th and 38th, and thence proceeded to Washington City, where I established permanent headquarters of the District on the 1st of August. I availed myself of a day at this time to review and inspect the two brigades of District militia in Alexandria and this place, and reported the result to Major-general Van Ness, commanding the District militia, in the letter herewith, marked No. 1.

The people of St. Mary's and Charles's had become extremely sore under the harassing service to which they had been subjected, and the devastation and plunder which the enemy had been so long committing on their shores; and the remonstrances of Brigadier-general Stuart, commanding the militia there under the state authority, had become extremely importunate with both the Secretary of War and the President to receive aid and protection

from the general government. The danger of throwing a force so far down into that neck of land, which exposed them to the danger of being cut off, besides that they would be lost for the defence of Washington, Baltimore, or Annapolis, had hitherto prevented me from pushing any part of my command so low down; but the President, in conversation, told me that their situation required aid, and directed me to move the detachments of the 36th and 38th down to unite with and aid General Stuart. I accordingly ordered Lieutenant-colonel Scott to move from Marlborough to Piscataway, and I proceeded directly down myself on the 3d. On the morning of the 4th of August I wrote the following letter from Port Tobacco, marked 13 A, to the Secretary of War, and, agreeably to the intention therein expressed, proceeded twelve miles below to General Stuart's camp. I there learned beyond doubt that the enemy had returned down the river; and, after assuring the general of support if they again advanced up the river, I returned back again to the City of Washington, directing Lieutenant-colonel Scott, commanding the regulars, to take up his encampment at a very convenient place two miles from Piscataway, on the road to the Wood Yard and Marlborough.

On my arrival at Washington, I found that the requisition made upon the Governor of Maryland for three thousand men, to be assembled at Bladensburg, had brought to that place only one company; but I learned that other detachments were about marching to that place, and, in order that no delay might occur in organizing and equipping them, I ordered Major Keyser, of the 38th regular infantry, to proceed to Bladensburg, to muster, inspect, and drill the detachments as they came in.

I thence proceeded to Baltimore to ascertain more precisely the effect of the requisition made on Major-general Smith for two thousand from his division; when arrived, I found about one thousand two hundred only assembled. I reviewed and inspected them, and gave Brigadier-general Stansbury orders to endeavor, by the most speedy means, to get in the delinquents and absentees.

I had just learned by a letter from the Governor of Maryland, and also from General Smith, that, upon General Smith's application to the Secretary of War, he had determined that the two thousand men now called to Baltimore, and which had been detached under a requisition of the Secretary of War directly on Gen-

eral Smith of the 20th of April, were to be considered as part of the quota of Maryland under the requisition of the 4th of July. I had drawn a different conclusion, and had so informed both the governor and General Smith in the visits I made to Annapolis and Baltimore about the 20th of July, immediately after receiving the letter from the Secretary of War of the 17th July, above exhibited. In order to supply the deficit in my calculation upon this force, I addressed the letter of the 13th of August to the Secretary of War, of which a copy, marked 14 A, is here presented; proceeded the same or the following day to Washington by the way of Annapolis, and on the 17th, at Washington, the day following my arrival, received the letter from the Secretary of War, of which a copy, marked 5 B, is sent.

I should have stated that, two days after my return to the City of Washington, about the 6th of August, I received two letters from the Secretary of War, the one dated the 15th, the other the 17th of July, which, having been addressed to me at Baltimore, had followed me backward and forward from place to place, and, unfortunately, only reached me at this late period; copies of these are herewith sent, marked 6 B and 7 B.

I had, in the mean time, addressed the letter of the 6th of August to the Governor of Pennsylvania, a copy of which is sent, marked 1 D, and upon the 8th, on the receiving the letter of the Secretary of War of the 15th, I wrote another letter to the Governor of Pennsylvania, of which, from haste or much occupation, I did not take a copy, or have mislaid it; it substantially, however, informed him of the number of militia I was authorized to call from him, requesting him to hasten their drafting and organization, and to transmit a list of the officers, from brigadiers down, who would command. Should this letter be deemed material, a copy can be obtained from the governor, and I have written to procure it.

I addressed on the 16th also a similar letter to the Governor of Virginia. On the 16th or 17th of August I received from the Secretary of State of Pennsylvania an answer, dated the 11th, of which a copy, marked 2 D, is herewith sent; and from the Adjutant-general of Virginia the answer and inclosures herewith sent, marked E.

On the morning of Thursday, the 18th, intelligence was received from the Observatory on Point Look-out that on the morning of

the 17th the enemy's fleet off that place had been re-enforced by a formidable squadron of ships and vessels of various sizes.

I immediately made requisitions upon the Governors of Maryland and Pennsylvania, and to various militia officers, copies of which are herewith sent, marked as follows: to the Governor of Pennsylvania, 3 D; to the Governor of Maryland, 2 C; to Major-general Smith, of Baltimore, 1 F; to Brigadier-general West, of Prince George's, Maryland, No. 18; to Major-general Van Ness, No. 4; to Brigadier-general Hungerford, Virginia, No. 14; to Brigadier-general Douglas and Colonel Chilton, of Virginia, and Brigadier-generals Ringgold, Swearingen, Barrack, and Foreman, of Maryland, No. 5.

Besides the letters and correspondence here referred to particularly, a mass of correspondence occurred with various persons relative to my command, and which, as far as I suppose they can have any influence on the investigation, are herewith sent.

That with the Governor of Maryland will be found in bundle C, and numbered, in addition to those already mentioned, from 3 C to 11 C, both inclusive. That with General Smith in bundle F; and that with other persons, not before referred to, with the numbers before referred to, are exhibited from No. 1 to No. 53 inclusive. Much other correspondence necessary to be carried on, and which occupied much time, took place, which, however, is not sent, as I deemed them not calculated to illustrate the inquiry, and only calculated uselessly to encumber and embarrass the inquiry. They will be furnished if thought requisite.

I will state as nearly as possible the forces which were in the field under these various demands and requisitions, the time of their assembling, their condition, and subsequent movements.

The returns first made, when I came into command, gave me,

Fort M'Henry, under the command of Major Armistead, non-commissioned officers, musicians, and privates, for duty	194
At Annapolis, in Forts Severn and Madison, under Lieutenant Fay	39
At Fort Washington, under Lieutenant Edwards	49
The detachments of the 36th and 38th, and a small detachment of artillery under Lieutenant-colonel Scott	330
	612

These corps received no addition, but were gradually diminishing by the ordinary causes which always operate to this effect.

The two thousand Maryland militia who were ordered to assemble at Baltimore had been drafted in pursuance of a requisition made by the Secretary of War on General Smith of the 20th of April, and as full time had been allowed to make the draft deliberately, they were, as far as practicable, ready to come without delay; notwithstanding, Brigadier-general Stansbury was unable to bring to Bladensburg more than one thousand four hundred, including officers, and arrived at Bladensburg on the evening of the 22d of August.

From General Stricker's brigade in the city of Baltimore, which had been called out en masse, I required a regiment of infantry, the battalion of riflemen, and two companies of artillery—not deeming it practicable to reconcile the people of Baltimore to march a greater number, and leave it without any force, and being strongly persuaded that the exigency would have drawn in time a greater force from the adjacent country. The detachment from Stricker's brigade, under Colonel Sterett, arrived at Bladensburg in the night of the 23d of August, and the total amount was nine hundred and fifty-six.

The detachment which had been stationed at Annapolis, under Colonel Hood, and which had been at the moment transferred by the Governor of Maryland to my command, arrived at the bridge at Bladensburg about fifteen minutes before the enemy appeared, and I suppose were from six to seven hundred strong. I have never had any return of it.

The brigade of General Smith, consisting of the militia of the District of Columbia on this side the Potomac, were called out on Thursday, the 18th of August, on Friday were assembled, and on Saturday, the 20th, they crossed the Eastern Branch Bridge, and advanced about five miles toward the Wood Yard. They amounted, I suppose, to about twelve hundred; a return was never had before they separated from my command, as there was not an interval of sufficient rest to have obtained one.

General Young's brigade, from Alexandria, between five and six hundred strong, crossed the Potomac Saturday or Sunday, the 19th or 20th, and took post near Piscataway.

The call for three thousand militia, under the requisition of the

4th of July, had produced only two hundred and fifty men at the moment the enemy landed at Benedict. In addition to the causes herein beforementioned, the inefficacy of this call is to be attributed to the incredulity of the people on the danger of invasion; the perplexed, broken, and harassed state of the militia in St. Mary's, Calvert, Charles's, Prince George's, and a part of Anne Arundel counties, which had rendered it impossible to make the draft in some of them, or to call them from those exposed situations where they had been on duty two months, under the local calls for Maryland.

Several other small detachments of Maryland militia, either as volunteers, or under the calls on the brigadiers, joined about the day before the action, whose numbers or commanding officers I did not know. They may have amounted to some four or five hundred.

Lieutenant-colonel Tilghman, of the Maryland cavalry, under an order of the Governor of Maryland, with about eighty dragoons, arrived at the City of Washington on the 16th of August, on his way to join General Stuart, in the lower part of Charles or St. Mary's County.

Under the permission I just then received to accept all the militia then in the field under the State of Maryland, I informed Colonel Tilghman that I had no doubt of the governor's sanction, for which I had applied, and recommended him to halt here. He agreed not only to this, but, by the consent of General Stuart, who happened then to be in the city sick, agreed to take my orders.

Lieutenant-colonel Laval, of the United States Light Dragoons, with a small squadron of about one hundred and twenty, who had been mounted at Carlisle the preceding Monday, arrived at Montgomery Court House on the evening of the 19th of August, reported himself to the war office, and received orders to report to me. He moved on the next morning, and crossed the Eastern Branch.

Captain Morgan, with a company of about eighty of the 12th United States Infantry, joined at the Long Old Fields on the evening of the 22d.

Colonel Minor, from Virginia, arrived at the city on the evening of the 23d with about five hundred men, wholly unarmed, and without equipments. Under the direction of Colonel Carberry, who

had been charged with this subject, they received arms, ammunition, &c., next morning, but not until after the action at Bladensburg.

No part of the 10th had yet arrived.

There had been no adjutant or inspector general attached to my command from its commencement. Major Hite, Assistant Adjutant-general, joined me on the 16th of August at Washington, and Major Smith, Assistant Inspector-general, on the 19th.

This was the situation, condition, and amount of my force and command.

It will be observed that this detail is continued up to the moment of the battle of Bladensburg; but, as the time at which the different corps respectively joined is stated, it will be readily seen what troops were concerned in the different movements which will now be detailed.

The innumerably multiplied orders, letters, consultations, and demands which crowded upon me at the moment of such an alarm, can more easily be conceived than described, and occupied me nearly day and night from Thursday, the 18th of August, till Sunday, the 21st, and had nearly broken down myself and assistants in preparing, dispensing, and attending to them.

On Thursday evening Colonel Monroe proposed, if I would detach a troop of cavalry with him, to proceed in the most probable direction to find the enemy and reconnoitre him. Captain Thornton's troop from Alexandria was detailed on this service, and on Friday morning the colonel departed with them. At this time it was supposed the enemy intended [coming up] the Bay, as one of his ships was already in view from Annapolis, and his boats were sounding South River. It was Colonel Monroe's intention to have proceeded direct to Annapolis; but, before he had got without the city, he received intelligence that the enemy had proceeded up the Patuxent, and were debarking at Benedict. He therefore bent his course to that place. By his first letter on Saturday, which reached the President that evening, he was unable to give any precise intelligence, except that the enemy were at Benedict in force.

On Saturday, Lieutenant-colonel Tilghman, with his squadron of dragoons, was dispatched by way of the Wood Yard to fall down upon the enemy, to annoy, harass, and impede their march by

every possible means, to remove or destroy forage and provision from before the enemy, and gain intelligence. Captain Caldwell, with his troop of city cavalry, was dispatched with the same views toward Benedict by Piscataway, it being wholly uncertain what route the enemy would take if it was his intention to come to Washington.

On Sunday I crossed the Eastern Branch, and joined Brigadier-general Smith at the Wood Yard, where Lieutenant-colonel Scott with the 36th and 38th, and Lieutenant-colonel Kramer with the militia from Bladensburg, had arrived by previous orders. On the road to the Wood Yard I received a letter from Colonel Monroe, of which a copy is sent, marked —, and at about eight o'clock in the evening I received another letter from him, of which a copy is sent, marked —, and in a very short time after he arrived himself, and immediately after Colonel Beall, who had seen a body of the enemy, which he estimated at four thousand (without supposing he had seen the whole), enter Nottingham on Sunday evening. Colonel Monroe, being much exhausted, retired to rest. I gave Colonel Beall, on account of his experience, orders to proceed and join Colonel Hood on his march from Annapolis, and take command of the detachment. I occupied the night in writing letters and orders to various officers and persons, and at daylight ordered a light detachment from General Smith's brigade under Major Peter, the regulars under Lieutenant-colonel Scott, and Laval's cavalry, to proceed immediately toward Nottingham to meet the enemy.

I proceeded immediately in advance myself, accompanied by Colonel Monroe and the gentlemen of my staff. I had learned that Colonel Tilghman, with his cavalry, on the advance of the enemy, had fallen back upon Marlborough the evening before, and had, during the night, sent him an order to proceed upon the road from Marlborough to Nottingham, and meet at the Chapel. Having got considerably in advance of Lieutenant-colonel Scott's and Major Peter's detachment, and also to obtain intelligence, I halted at Mr. Oden's, within half a mile of the junction of the roads from Marlborough and the Wood Yard to Nottingham, directing Laval to gain the Marlborough road, post himself at the Chapel, and push forward patrols upon all the roads toward Nottingham. In less than half an hour, and before the detachments of Scott and Peter

had come up, intelligence was brought that the enemy was moving on from Nottingham in force toward the Chapel. I immediately proceeded, with the gentlemen who were with me, to gain an observation of the enemy, and came within view of the enemy's advance about two miles below the Chapel. The observation was continued until the enemy reached the Chapel, and Scott and Peter being then near two miles distant from that point, and it being therefore impossible for them to reach the junction of the Marlborough and Wood Yard road before the enemy, I sent orders for them to post themselves in the most advantageous position, and wait for me with the body of the cavalry. I turned into the road to the Wood Yard, and detached a small party, under Adjutant-general Hite, on the Marlborough road, to watch the enemy's movements on that road and give information. Upon arriving at Oden's, himself or some other person of the neighborhood whom I knew, and on whom I could rely, informed me that there was a more direct road, but not so much frequented, leading from Nottingham to the Wood Yard, and joining that on which I then was, and two miles nearer the Wood Yard.

A doubt at that time was not entertained by any body of the intention of the enemy to proceed direct to Washington, and the advantage of dividing their force, and proceeding on two roads, running so near each other to the same point, so obvious, that I gave orders to Scott and Peter to retire, and occupy the first eligible position between the junction of that road and the one we were on and the Wood Yard; dispatched a patrol of cavalry to observe that road, and give the earliest notice of any advance of the enemy upon it. I still continued the observation of the enemy myself, and he turned a part of his column into the road to the Wood Yard, and penetrated a skirt of wood which hid the junction of the Marlborough and Wood Yard road from view, and there halted it, within a quarter of a mile of Oden's house. I hesitated for some time whether to attribute his delay to a view which he may have had of Scott's and Peter's detachments, or to a design to conceal his movement toward Marlborough, the road to that place being concealed by woods from any point of observation which could be gained.

It appeared afterward that his whole force halted there for an hour or upward, and thus continued in an uncertainty as to his

intended route. I had, in the mean time, rode back and assisted Peter and Scott to post their detachments in a favorable position, from whence I entertained a hope to have given the enemy a serious check, without much risk to this detachment. Orders had been previously sent to General Smith to post his whole detachment in conjunction with Commodore Barney, who had by this time joined him from Marlborough with about four hundred sailors and marines, and had taken also command of the marines under Captain Miller, who had arrived from the city the night before. I presumed, from the appearance of this force, it was about one hundred or one hundred and twenty. As soon as I had satisfied myself as to the position and disposition of Scott's and Peter's detachments, I advanced again toward the enemy to ascertain his situation and intentions. It had now become certain that he had taken the road to Marlborough, and Colonel Monroe crossed over to that place to join Lieutenant-colonel Tilghman, and observe his movements.

I sent an order immediately to Scott and Peter to retire back to General Smith, and the latter to take post at the point where the roads from Washington City and the Wood Yard to Marlborough unite. This order was incorrectly delivered or misunderstood, and he took post instead at the point where the roads from the Wood Yard and Marlborough to the City of Washington unite. The mistake, however, produced no inconvenience, but, on the contrary, was perhaps better than the position to which I had directed, because it threw my force more between Marlborough and Bladensburg, and also in command of the road by which the enemy did finally advance, which the other position would not have done. Its inconvenience was that it left open the road to Fort Washington, and rendered General Young's junction, if it should become proper to advance him, hazardous on that road. It further became necessary to retire still further back, and the only position where the troops could be tolerably accommodated, or posted to advantage, was at Dunlap's, or, as it is generally called, the Long or Battalion Old Fields.

General Smith was therefore ordered to retire to that point with the whole of the troops except the cavalry. Lieutenant-colonel Tilghman and Captain Herbert were charged with hovering upon the enemy on all the roads leading from Bladensburg, from the

north, and from Annapolis, to Marlborough. With Laval's cavalry I advanced to the nearest and most convenient positions between the Wood Yard and Marlborough, and found the enemy quietly halted at Marlborough. Tilghman's cavalry picked up one or two prisoners who had straggled beyond the enemy's pickets, and my examination of them confirmed me that the enemy did not contemplate leaving Marlborough that day.

After remaining near Marlborough in observation till toward the latter part of the afternoon, I returned to General Smith, where I arrived toward the close of the day. About dark I learned that the President and heads of departments had arrived at a house about a mile in the rear of the camp. I detached a captain's guard to his quarters, advanced the cavalry of Laval on the roads toward Marlborough, with orders to patrol as close upon the enemy as possible during the course of the night; and, after having waded through the infinite applications, consultations, and calls necessarily arising from a body of two thousand five hundred men, not three days from their homes, without organization or any practical knowledge of service on the part of their officers, and being obliged to listen to the officious but well-intended information and advice of the crowd, who, at such a time, would be full of both, I lay down to snatch a moment of rest.

A causeless alarm from one of the sentinels placed the whole force under arms about three o'clock in the morning. A short time after sunrise I rode over to the quarters of the President to inform him and the Secretary of War of the state of things. Upon my return, rumors prevailed that the enemy had taken the road to Queen Anne, which was directly leading to Annapolis. I could not, however, suppose that Lieutenant-colonel Tilghman and Captain Herbert would fail to advise me if the fact were so. The rumor, however, gained ground, and just at this time Mr. Luffborough, of this city, with some fifteen or twenty mounted men, offered himself ready to perform any duties on which I could employ them. I immediately dispatched him to ascertain the truth of this report, by penetrating to that road, and also to obtain whatever information he could relative to the enemy. About twelve o'clock he sent me decisive information that the enemy were not on the Annapolis road.

I received constant intelligence that the enemy still remained in

Marlborough, and, therefore, felt no doubt that, if he intended to take the road to Annapolis, any movement upon that road was only an advance party for observation, and preparatory to a general movement; and as the morning advanced, and the information brought still confirmed the impression that the enemy intended no movement from Upper Marlborough, I resolved to endeavor to concentrate the force (which, I hoped, had now considerably accumulated within my reach) down upon the enemy's lines near Marlborough.

I accordingly ordered a light detachment to be sent forward by General Smith, under Major Peter; and having also learned by Major Woodyear, of General Stansbury's staff, that he had arrived the evening before at Bladensburg, I sent orders to him to advance toward Marlborough, and to take post at the point where the Old Fields to Queen Anne crosses the road from Bladensburg to Marlborough, which brought him within four miles of the Old Fields, and within from six to eight of the enemy. I was anxiously waiting to hear of Lieutenant-colonel Beall's progress with the detachment for Annapolis, and of Lieutenant-colonel Sterett's from Baltimore.

The President and heads of departments had been on the field since about eight o'clock. I communicated my views and intentions as above detailed, and informed them that I proposed myself to pass over the road from Bladensburg to Marlborough, to meet General Stansbury, to make closer observations upon the road direct from the enemy to Bladensburg, and to establish more thoroughly a concert between Stansbury and Smith's command; to be also nearer to Beall, to give him also a direction toward the enemy on the road leading into Marlborough from the north, if my intelligence should continue to justify it, and to draw down Lieutenant-colonel Sterett, with his force, as soon as I should ascertain where he was. I accordingly, with a troop of Laval's cavalry, proceeded about twelve o'clock. Upon arriving at the Bladensburg road, I halted, and pushed a patrol of cavalry down toward Marlborough.

In a few minutes after, three of Captain Herbert's troop, who were observing down the same road, arrived with two prisoners, whom they had just seized in a very bold and dexterous manner. The information of these prisoners confirmed the impression that

the enemy did not intend to move from Marlborough that day; and, as it was now one o'clock, I felt little doubt of it. After remaining some time for intelligence from the United States dragoons that I had sent down with orders to press down as closely as possible upon the enemy, a slight firing was heard in the direction of the enemy, which I concluded was from the enemy's picket upon this party. A few minutes confirmed this conjecture by the return of a dragoon with this intelligence. A more considerable firing was then, however, heard, which I concluded to be a skirmishing by Peter's detachment with the enemy, put upon the alert and advance by the firing at the dragoons.

The firing soon after ceased, and after having sent for the purpose of ascertaining the fact, with directions to follow with intelligence on toward Bladensburg, in which direction I proceeded, with the expectation of meeting General Stansbury, and with the intention to halt him until my intelligence should decide my further proceedings.

I had proceeded within four or five miles of Bladensburg without meeting General Stansbury, when I was overtaken by Major M'Kenney, a volunteer aid with General Smith, who informed me that Peter had skirmished with the advancing enemy, who had driven him back on General Smith, and that the enemy had halted within three miles of the Old Fields; that, agreeably to my direction upon the probability of an attack, General Smith had sent off the baggage across the Eastern Branch, and that himself and Commodore Barney had drawn up the forces ready to receive the enemy, should he advance. On my way toward Bladensburg I had left orders with Lieutenant-colonel Tilghman's cavalry to continue their observation on the Bladensburg and Marlborough roads, and in case the enemy should move on that road, to give General Stansbury immediate notice and fall back on him. In proceeding to the Old Fields, I met Lieutenant-colonel Tilghman himself, and renewed these directions. Captain Herbert was also between General Stansbury and the enemy with the same instructions.

When Major M'Kenney gave me the intelligence of the advance of the enemy, I dispatched an aid to General Stansbury with directions to him to fall back and take the best position in advance of Bladensburg, and unite Lieutenant-colonel Sterett with him should he arrive at Bladensburg, as I expected, that evening; and should

he be attacked, to resist as long as possible, and if obliged to retire, to retreat toward the city.

I reached the Old Fields about five o'clock in the afternoon, and found General Smith and Commodore Barney had judiciously posted their men in expectation of the enemy, and were expecting his approach. The head of the enemy's column was about three miles from our position, and five miles from Marlborough. He must have reached that point by or before three o'clock, and his halt there at that period of the day, so short a distance from Marlborough, and apparently only drawn out by my parties pressing upon him, and at a point from whence he could take the road to Bladensburg, to the Eastern Branch Bridge, or Fort Washington indifferently, or it might be to cover his march upon Annapolis, to which place he had strong temptations to proceed. His force was very imperfectly known, the opinions and representations varying from four to twelve thousand; the better opinion fixed it from five to seven thousand. If he supposed his force insufficient to proceed to Washington, and further re-enforcements were expected, which all information concurred to state, the natural conclusion was that he would seek some place where he could in security refresh his men, and place them in comfortable quarters near a convenient port for his ships, and whence, upon receiving re-enforcements, he would be ready to act against the important points of the country. Having, therefore, already accomplished one great object of the expedition—the destruction of Commodore Barney's flotilla—if he was not in a condition to proceed further into the country, Annapolis offered him a place in all respects such as he would desire. It brought him to a fine port, where his ships could lie in safety; it afforded abundant and comfortable quarters for his men; magazines and store-houses for all his stores and munitions of every description; was capable, with very little labor, of being rendered impregnable by land, and he commanded the water; it was the nearest point of debarkation to the City of Washington, without entering a narrow river liable to great uncertainty in its navigation from adverse winds, and was at hand to Baltimore; equally threatening these two great points, and rendering it absolutely necessary to keep a force doubly sufficient to resist him—one for the protection of Washington, the other for Baltimore. The squadron which was ascending the Potomac, and had

now passed the Kettle Bottoms, the only obstruction in the navigation of the river, might be only a feint, the more effectually to conceal their intentions against Annapolis, or, what was more probable, was intended to unite with the land force and co-operate in a joint attack on Washington. It was therefore strongly believed that the land force was destined to proceed and take Fort Washington in the rear, where it was wholly defenceless, while it was capable of offering very formidable resistance to the ascent of ships up the river, and, imperfect as it was, perhaps capable of repulsing them altogether. And it was therefore that I sent to General Young, when the force of General Smith fell back to the Old Fields, to take a position so as to protect Fort Washington, and avoid being taken in the rear by the enemy.

If the object of the enemy was to proceed direct to Washington, the road by Bladensburg offered fewer obstructions than that over the Eastern Branch Bridge, although it was six miles further; and yet, if I had retired toward Bladensburg, I should have been removed so much further from annoying or impeding the enemy, if he proceeded to Fort Washington, and I should have left the road to Washington City, by the Eastern Branch Bridge, open to him, which, although I had, as I supposed, left a secure arrangement for its destruction, yet the importance of leaving that bridge as long as possible on account of its great value to us, and the danger that, in the multitude of business which was accumulated on every person during such an alarm, confusion and disorder arising at such a moment, with such raw, undisciplined, inexperienced, and unknown officers and men, rendered it hazardous to trust this direct and important pass unguarded.

It was under all these circumstances that, after waiting for the enemy at the Old Fields till sundown, I determined to retire over the Eastern Branch Bridge, in which Commodore Barney concurred, and his force, with mine, proceeded accordingly.

My reasons for not remaining at the Old Fields during the night was that, if an attack should be made in the night, our own superiority, which lay in artillery, was lost, and the inexperience of the troops would subject them to certain, infallible, and irremediable disorder, and probably destruction, and thereby occasion the loss of a full half of the force which I could hope to oppose, under more favorable circumstances, to the enemy.

The reasons for retiring by the Eastern Branch Bridge were the absolute security it gave to that pass, the greater facility of joining General Young and aiding in the protection of Fort Washington, the greater facility of pursuing the enemy should he recede and proceed to Annapolis, and the certainty that I could draw General Stansbury and Lieutenant-colonel Sterett to me if the enemy advanced too rapidly for me to advance, and unite to support them.

Under the harassing and perplexing embarrassments arising from having a mass of men suddenly assembled, without organization, discipline, or officers of any, the least, knowledge of service, except in the case of Major Peter, or, if possessing it, unknown to me as such, and the wearied and exhausted state in which incessant application and exertion for nearly five uninterrupted days and nights had left me, these views offered themselves to my mind, and determined me to fall back, on Tuesday evening, to the bridge instead of Bladensburg. Since the event has passed, and if a movement to Bladensburg, had it been made, would not have induced the enemy to pursue another course, it is easy to determine that a retreat to Bladensburg might have been better; but those who undertake to pass a judgment should place themselves back to the moment and situation I was in when I formed the resolution, and it will be very difficult to find it an error; or if one, it is of that sort which is supported, when viewed in perspective, by stronger reasons than those which oppose it, and is only found to be an error by experience, which so often confounds all reason and calculation.

Upon arriving at the bridge, about eight o'clock, I directed General Smith to halt his men in the most convenient position near the bridge on this side, and I passed over and rode directly to the President's, and informed him of the then state of things. I had expected I should probably have found the Secretary of War and other heads of departments there; but they had respectively retired to their homes. I returned toward the bridge, leaving at M'Keowin's hotel the borrowed horse on which I rode. Both those I had with me being exhausted and worn down, and as I knew no one who had a horse in a different situation, I proceeded to the camp on foot. General Smith was not, at the moment, there.

I proceeded on to the bridge, where I found about thirty men with axes, for the purpose of cutting the bridge down, and no other preparation for destroying it made. I proceeded again to the camp, detached a party of volunteers to burn the upper bridge at once, detached a party of regular infantry across the bridge, in advance toward the enemy about half a mile, to prevent him from seizing it by surprise, and posted Burch's artillery to command the pass of the bridge on this side. I learned at the bridge that some persons from the navy-yard had been to the bridge to take some steps for destroying it; and knowing that this was the nearest, and the only place, indeed, from whence I could draw the powder, boats, and combustibles for the purpose of rendering its destruction sure at any moment, I proceeded, accompanied by Major Cox, of Georgetown, to ascertain what preparations had been made. I arrived there about twelve or one o'clock, saw Colonel Wharton, who referred me to Commodore Tingey, to whom I then proceeded, and aroused him from bed. He informed me that several casks of powder were ready in boats to be sent from the navy-yard to blow up the bridge when necessary. I begged him to increase the quantity of powder, to furnish a quantity of combustibles, also, to be laid upon the bridge, that its destruction, when necessary, in one way or other might be put beyond doubt. Commodore Tingey undertook to have what I requested provided sent without delay to the bridge. I returned to the bridge to see that the different detachments which I had stationed there were upon the alert, and understood the objects for which they were detached; and I thence returned to the camp between three and four o'clock, much exhausted, and considerably hurt in the right arm and ankle from a severe fall which I had into a gully or ditch on my way to the navy-yard. I snatched about an hour or two of sleep, rose, and proceeded to gather my attendants and horses, much exhausted and worn down by the incessant action of the three preceding days, and proceeded to establish my head-quarters at a house near the bridge.

My patrols and vedettes not having yet brought me any intelligence of a movement of the enemy, and being still doubtful whether he might not move upon Annapolis, Fort Warburton, or toward the bridge rather than Bladensburg, I held the position near the bridge as that which, under all circumstances, would enable me

best to act against the enemy in any alternative. I learned about this time, with considerable mortification, that General Stansbury, from misunderstanding or some other cause, instead of holding a position during the night in advance of Bladensburg, had taken one about a mile in its rear, and that his men, from a causeless alarm, had been under arms the greater part of the night, and moved once or twice, and that he was at that moment on his march into the city. I instantly sent him an order to resume his position at Bladensburg; to post himself to the best advantage; make the utmost resistance, and to rely upon my supporting him if the enemy should move upon that road. I had, at a very early hour in the morning, detached Captain Graham, with his troop of Virginia cavalry, to proceed by Bladensburg down upon the road toward the enemy, and insure, by that means, timely notice to General Stansbury and myself, should the enemy turn that way. With this addition to the cavalry already on those roads, it became impossible for the enemy to take any steps unobserved. Additional cavalry patrols and vedettes were also detached upon all the roads across the bridge, to insure the certainty of intelligence, let the enemy move as he might.

Colonel Minor had also arrived in the city the evening before, with five or six hundred militia from Virginia, but they were without arms, accoutrements, or ammunition. I urged him to hasten his equipment, which I learned was delayed by some difficulty in finding Colonel Carberry, charged with that business; and he had not received his arms, &c., when, about ten o'clock, I received intelligence that the enemy had turned the head of his column toward Bladensburg. Commodore Barney had, upon my suggestion, posted his artillery to command the bridge early in the morning.

As soon as I learned the enemy were moving toward Bladensburg, I ordered General Smith, with the whole of the troops, to move immediately to that point.

The necessary detention arising from orders to issue, interrogations and applications to be answered from all points being past, I proceeded on to Bladensburg, leaving the President and some of the heads of departments at my quarters, where they had been for an hour or more.

I arrived at the bridge at Bladensburg about twelve o'clock, where

I found Lieutenant-colonel Beall had that moment passed with his command, having just arrived from Annapolis. I had passed the line of Stansbury's brigade, formed in the field upon the left of the road, at about a quarter of a mile in the rear of the bridge; and on the road, a short distance in the rear of Stansbury's line, I met several gentlemen, and among the others, I think, Mr. Francis Key, of Georgetown, who informed me that he had thought that the troops coming from the city could be most advantageously posted on the right and left of the road near that point. General Smith being present, Mr. Key undertook, I believe, being sent for that purpose, to show the positions proposed. I left General Smith to make a disposition of these troops, and proceeded to the bridge, where I found Lieutenant-colonel Beall, as before stated.* I inquired whether he had any directions as to his position; he replied he had been shown a high hill upon the right of the road, ranging with the proposed second line. It being a commanding position, and necessary to be occupied by some corps, I directed him to proceed agreeably to the instructions he had received. I then rode up to a battery which had been thrown up to command the street which entered Bladensburg from the side of the enemy and the bridge, where I found the Baltimore artillery posted, with the Baltimore riflemen to support them. Upon inquiry, I learned that General Stansbury was on a rising ground upon the left of his line. I rode immediately thither, and found him and Colonel Monroe together. The latter gentleman informed me that he had been aiding General Stansbury to post his command, and wished me to proceed to examine it with them, to see how far I approved of it. We were just proceeding with this view, when some person rode up and stated that the news had just been received of a signal victory obtained by General Izard over the enemy, in which one thousand of the enemy were slain, and many prisoners taken. I ordered the news to be immediately communicated to the troops, for the purpose of giving additional impulse to their spirits and

* Since writing the above, I have seen General Smith, who informs me that Mr. Key had been examining the grounds with him, and that it was his views that Mr. Key had been stating. He came up at the moment Mr. Key had given me the information. I have been under the impression, till thus corrected, that it was the suggestion of Colonel Monroe and General Stansbury that had suggested that position. The circumstance is immaterial except for the purpose of literal accuracy when necessary.

courage. The column of the enemy at this moment appeared in sight, moving up the Eastern Branch parallel to our position. From the left, where I was, I perceived that if the position of the advanced artillery were forced, two or three pieces upon the left of Stansbury would be necessary to scour an orchard which lay between his line and his artillery, and for another rifle company to increase the support of this artillery.

These were promptly sent forward by General Smith, and posted as hastily as possible, and it was barely accomplished before I was obliged to give orders to the advanced artillery to open upon the enemy, who was descending the street toward the bridge. All farther examination or movement was now impossible, and the position where I then was, immediately in the rear of the left of Stansbury's line, being the most advanced position from which I could have any commanding view, I remained there. The fire of our advanced artillery occasioned the enemy, who were advancing, and who were light troops, to leave the street, and they crept down under the cover of houses and trees, in loose order, so as not to expose them to risk from the shot; it was therefore only occasionally that an object presented at which the artillery could fire.

In this sort of suspension, the enemy began to throw his rockets, and his light troops began to accumulate down in the lower parts of the town and near the bridge, but principally covered from view by the houses. Their light troops, however, soon began to issue out and press across the creek, which was every where fordable, and in most places lined with bushes or trees, which were sufficient, however, to conceal the movements of light troops, who act, in the manner of theirs, singly. The advanced riflemen now began to fire, and continued it for half a dozen rounds, when I observed them to run back to the skirts of the orchard on the left, where they became visible, the boughs of the orchard trees concealing their original position, as also that of the artillery from view. A retreat of twenty or thirty yards from their original position toward the left brought them in view on the edge of the orchard. They halted there, and seemed for a moment returning to their position; but in a few minutes entirely broke, and retired to the left of Stansbury's line. I immediately ordered the 5th Baltimore regiment, Lieutenant-colonel Steret, being the left of Stansbury's

line, to advance and sustain the artillery. They promptly commenced this movement; but the rockets, which had for the first three or four passed very high above the heads of the line, now received a more horizontal direction, and passed very close above the heads of Shutz's and Ragan's regiments, composing the centre and left of Stansbury's line. A universal flight of these regiments was the consequence. This leaving the right of the 5th wholly unsupported, I ordered it to halt, rode swiftly across the field toward those who had so shamefully fled, and exerted my voice to the utmost to arrest them. They halted, began to collect, and seemed to be returning to their places. An ill-founded reliance that their officers would succeed in rallying them, when I had thus succeeded in stopping the greatest part of them, induced me immediately to return to the 5th, the situation of which was likely to become very critical, and that position gave me the best command of view. To my astonishment and mortification, however, when I had regained my position, I found the whole of these regiments (except thirty or forty of Ragan's, rallied by himself, and as many, perhaps, of Shutz's, rallied, I learn, by Captain Shower and Captain ——, whose name I do not recollect) were flying in the utmost precipitation and disorder.

The advanced artillery had immediately followed the riflemen, and retired by the left of the 5th. I directed them to take post on a rising ground which I pointed out in the rear. The 5th, and the artillery on its left, still remained, and I hoped that their fire, notwithstanding the obstruction of the boughs of the orchard, which, being below, covered the enemy, would have been enabled to scour this approach and prevent his advance. The enemy's light troops, by single men, showed themselves on the lower edge of the left of the orchard, and received the fire of this artillery and the 5th, which made them draw back. The cover to them was, however, so complete, that they were enabled to advance singly, and take positions from which their fire annoyed the 5th considerably, without either that regiment or the artillery being able to return the fire with any probability of effect. In this situation I had actually given an order to the 5th and the artillery to retire up to the hill, toward a wood more to the left and a little in the rear, for the purpose of drawing them farther from the orchard, and out of reach of the enemy's fire while he was sheltered by the orchard. An

aversion, however, to retire before the necessity became stronger, and the hope that the enemy would issue in a body from the left of the orchard and enable us to act upon him on terms of equality, and the fear that a movement of retreat might in raw troops produce some confusion and lose us this chance, induced me instantly to countermand the order, and direct the artillery to fire into a wooden barn on the lower end of the orchard, behind which I supposed the enemy might be sheltered in considerable numbers. The fire of the enemy now began, however, to annoy the 5th still more in wounding several of them, and a strong column of the enemy having passed up the road as high as the right of the 5th, and beginning to deploy into the field to take them in flank, I directed the artillery to retire to the hill to which I had directed the Baltimore artillery to proceed and halt, and ordered the 8th regiment also to retire. This corps, which had heretofore acted so firmly, evinced the usual incapacity of raw troops to make orderly movements in the face of the enemy, and their retreat in a very few moments became a flight of absolute and total disorder.

The direct line of retreat to the whole of this first line being to the hill on which I had directed the artillery to halt, and immediately in connection with the positions of General Smith's corps, which were not arrayed in line, but posted on advantageous positions in connection with and supporting each other, according as the nature of the ground admitted and required, I had not for a moment, dispersed and disordered as was the whole of Stansbury's command, supposed that their retreat would have taken a different direction. But it soon became apparent that the whole mass were throwing themselves off to the right on the retreat toward Montgomery Court House, and flying wide of this point; the whole of the cavalry, probably from the pressure of the infantry that way, were also thrown wide of the line of retreat toward the right.

After making every effort to turn the current more toward General Smith's command and the city in vain, and finding that it was impossible to collect any force to support the artillery, which I had directed to halt, and finding also that the enemy's light troops were extending themselves in that direction, and pressing the pursuit, I directed the artillery to continue their retreat on the road they then were toward the Capitol, it being impossible for them to get across to the turnpike road or unite wi.' General Smith's brigade.

The hope of again forming the first line at this point, and there renewing the retreat, or, at all events, of being able to rally them between the Capitol and that point and renewing the contest, induced me, at the moment I directed the 5th regiment to retreat, to request Mr. Riggs, of Georgetown, to proceed to the President and inform him that we had been driven back, but that it was my hope and intention to form and renew the contest between that place and the Capitol.

As soon as I found it vain longer to endeavor to turn the tide of retreat toward the left, I turned toward the positions occupied by Lieutenant-colonel Beall, Commodore Barney, and General Smith. By this time the enemy had advanced up the road, had driven back Lieutenant-colonel Kramer's command, posted on the right of the road, and in advance of Commodore Barney, after having well maintained his position and much hurt the enemy, and also continued to fire during his retreat. He had come under the destructive fire of Commodore Barney, which had turned him up the hill toward Lieutenant-colonel Beall, whose detachment gave one or two ineffective fires and fled. Their position was known to me, was very conspicuous, and the extreme right. The enemy, therefore, had gained this commanding position, and was passing our right flank; his force pursuing on the left had also advanced to a line with our left, and there was nothing there to oppose him. To preserve Smith's command from being pressed in front by fresh troops of the enemy, who were coming on at the same time, while they were under the certainty of being assailed on both flanks and the rear by the enemy, who respectively gained them, in which circumstances their destruction or surrender would have been inevitable, I sent (my horse being unable to move with the rapidity I wished) to General Smith to retreat. I am not acquainted with the relative position of the different corps composing his command, and can not, therefore, determine who of them engaged the enemy, nor could I see how they acted; but when I arrived in succession at his different corps, which I did as soon as practicable, I do not recollect to have found any of them that were not in order, and retreating with as little confusion as could have been expected. When I reached the road I found Commodore Barney's men also retiring on the road, he having been overpowered by those who drove off Beall's regiment about the time I sent the order to retreat.

I still had no doubt but that Stansbury's command and the cavalry would have fallen down upon the Capitol by the roads which enter that part of the city from the north, and still solaced myself with the persuasion that I should be able there to rally them upon the city and Georgetown troops, who were retiring in order, and make another effort in advance of the Capitol to repulse the enemy.

After accompanying the retreating army within two miles of the Capitol, I rode forward for the purpose of selecting a position, and endeavoring to collect those who I supposed, from the rapidity of their flight, might have reached that point. A half a mile in advance of the Capitol I met Colonel Minor with his detachment, and directed him to form his men, wait until the retreating army passed, and protect them, if necessary. When I arrived at the Capitol I found not a man had passed that way, and, notwithstanding the commanding view which is there afforded to the north, I could see no appearance of the troops. I dispatched an order to call in the cavalry to me there.

In a few moments the Secretary of State and the Secretary of War joined me, besides that they had been witnesses to the dispersion of the troops and the exhaustion of those just halted by me. I stated the diminution of my force, and the extent of the positions, which rendered it impossible to place the force I then had in such a position as to prevent the enemy from taking me on the flank as well as front, and that no reasonable hope could be entertained that we had any troops that could be relied on to make a resistance as desperate as necessary, in an isolated building which could not be supported by a sufficiency of troops without; indeed, it would have taken nearly the whole of the troops to have sufficiently filled the two wings, which would have left the enemy masters of every other part of the city, and given him the opportunity, without risk, in twenty-four hours, to have starved them into a surrender. The same objection equally applied to the occupation of any part of the city.

Both these gentlemen concurred that it would subject my force to certain capture or destruction; and in its reduced and exhausted condition, it was wise and proper to retire through Georgetown, and take post in the rear of it, on the heights, to collect my force. I accordingly pursued this course, and halted at Tenleytown two miles from Georgetown, on the Frederick road. Here was evinced

one of the great defects of all undisciplined and unorganized troops; no effort could rouse officers and men to the exertion necessary to place themselves in such a state of comfort and security as is attainable even under very disadvantageous circumstances. Such of them as could be halted, instead of making those efforts, gave themselves up to the uncontrolled feelings which fatigue, exhaustion, and privation produced, and many hundreds, in spite of all precautions and efforts, passed on and pursued their way, either toward home, or in search of refreshments and quarters. After waiting in this position until I supposed I collected all the force that could be gathered, I proceeded about five miles further on the river road, which leads a little wide to the left of Montgomery Court House, and in the morning gave orders for the whole to assemble at Montgomery Court House.

This position promised us shelter from the rain that began to fall an hour before day; was the most probable place for the supply of provisions, which the troops very much needed, and was a position from which we could best interpose between the enemy and Baltimore, and to which place, at that time, nobody doubted he intended to go by land from Washington.

In pursuance of this view, among the first acts after my arrival at Montgomery Court House was to direct a letter to General Stricker, who commanded at Baltimore, informing him that it was my intention to gather my force together there, receive what reenforcements I could, show myself to the enemy as strong as possible, hang on his flank should he move to Baltimore, intimidate and harass him as much as possible in his movements, and endeavor always to preserve the power of interposing between him and Baltimore; directing him to re-establish the dispersed command of Lieutenant-colonel Sterett, multiply his means as much as possible, stop all re-enforcements of militia from Maryland, Pennsylvania, or elsewhere, and present himself to the enemy at the crossing of the Patapsco in as imposing a form as possible.

This letter I sent by Captain Aisquith, whom I found at Montgomery with fifteen or twenty others, the only part of the Baltimore detachment which had not returned home.

The first object was, in the absence of quarter-master and contractor, to make efforts to provide quarters and refreshments for my men; a few provisions were found there belonging to the con-

tractor, and a person temporarily appointed to issue, and the most active men of the place called upon and authorized to get in provisions.

The next object was to obtain a return of the different corps, which, from causes that can easily be understood among undisciplined men and unskilful officers, proved abortive before we moved next day. The arrival of several detachments of re-enforcements, the reports of officers bringing on detachments, who wanted orders and instructions, and the multiplied complaints of men and officers crowded together in small quarters, or entirely out of doors in a rainy, tempestuous day, the calculations and arrangements necessary for ulterior operations, and to meet the demands and wants of the great force which my calls were likely to produce, may be supposed to have been as much as could be borne by the efforts and attention of one man, which he was obliged to encounter for the want of a skilful, or even organized staff of any kind.

No regular details for service of any kind could be performed, and all the duties of this description were necessarily performed by the voluntary zeal of those corps who could not be borne down or discouraged by difficulties. My efforts were devoted to endeavor to prepare the detachment to move down toward the city, and hang upon and strike at the enemy whenever an opportunity occurred. The next morning, however, before a return of the corps could be had, and their situation known, I received intelligence that the enemy had moved from Washington the preceding night, and was in full march for Baltimore. I instantly put my command under arms, multiplied and strengthened my patrols to gain intelligence, and advanced as rapidly as was practicable to Baltimore. When the forces arrived at Snell's Bridge, on the upper branch of the Patuxent, I had concluded that, if the enemy was, as we had still reason to believe, proceeding to Baltimore, it would be most advisable for me to proceed directly thither, to lend the whole force of my power, as commander of the district, to call out and bring into activity the resources of the place, and also because it was likely to become the most important station of the command. I accordingly left the command with General Stansbury, senior brigadier, and proceeded that night to Baltimore. On the road I met an express from Major-general S. Smith, who delivered me a letter, in which he informed me that he had been call-

ed out into service, and had assumed the command according to his rank; and by the time I reached Baltimore, I also learned that the enemy was proceeding to Marlborough, and not toward Baltimore.

If I had had longer time, or to repeat the action of Bladensburg, I could correct several errors, which might materially have affected the issue of that battle. The advanced force ought to have been nearer to the creek, along the edge of the low ground, where they would have been skirted with bushes, and have avoided the inconvenience of the cover which the orchard afforded the enemy. The edge of the low grounds on the right of the road ought to have been lined with musketry, and a battery of cannon also planted in the field on the right of the road, directly fronting the bridge; and if Commodore Barney's heavy artillery, with his more expert artillerists, had occupied the position which the advanced artillerists did, and these posts been obstinately defended, the enemy would not have crossed the river at that point, but would have been obliged to have made a circuit around to his right, and have crossed above and at the upper end of the town; or, if the whole force had been posted at the position of the second line, with all the advantage which it afforded, and had acted with tolerable courage and firmness, the event might have been different; but no advantage of position is proof against groundless panic, and a total want of discipline, skill, and experience.

On the night of my retreat to the city, I sent Assistant-adjutant-general Hite down to General Young to inform him of the movement, and to direct him to take the best position to secure Fort Washington and his junction with me; or, in case the enemy should interpose between him and me, to have his boats ready to transport his men across the river; or, if he could not do that, to fall down the river and unite with General Stuart, and harass the enemy in the rear; and, above all, to be alert, and keep a vigilant guard upon every avenue of approach, to prevent a surprise. I also sent by Major Hite directions to the commanding officer of Fort Washington to advance a guard up to the main road upon all the roads leading to the fort, and in the event of his being taken in the rear of the fort by the enemy, to blow up the fort and retire across the river.

The distance of General Young, and the necessity of retaining

a position near the fort as long as the designs of the enemy remained uncertain, rendered it impossible to have the assistance of his force at Bladensburg.

There was not a bridge on the road which the enemy pursued from his debarkation to Washington the destruction of which would have retarded his advance ten minutes. I believe, in fact, that the bridge at Bladensburg is the only one, and the facility with which that stream is every where fordable above the bridge, rendered useless the destroying it. Indeed, I believe that, had artillery been posted as advantageously as it might have been, and well served, the bridge would have acted as a decoy to the enemy to lead him into danger, and have been useful to us.

Those who have that happy intrepidity of assurance in their own capacity to see with certainty, in all cases, the means by which they could have avoided the errors of others, and by which past calamities might always have been averted, will find my condemnation easy. Those who are disposed to measure difficulties by the limits of human capacity, and who will impartially place themselves in my situation, will find it difficult to decide that any errors have been committed which might not have been equaled or surpassed by any other commander, or that the calamities which have followed could have been averted or mitigated.

No. II.

REPORT OF GENERAL STANSBURY.

Baltimore, November 15, 1814.

By general orders from the War Department of the 20th of April, 1814, Major-general Smith was directed to draft from his division, and hold in readiness to march at a moment's warning, two thousand men, officers included.

By Major-general Smith's division orders of the 29th of April, I was directed to furnish by draft from my brigade, as its quota, one thousand of this requisition, and hold them in readiness to march, at a moment's warning, to Baltimore for its defence. The 1st of May those orders were complied with, agreeably to a detail accompanying said orders.

On the 15th of July Major-general Smith issued division or-

ders requiring the quota from my brigade, the 11th, and that from the 2d and 9th, to march and rendezvous at Baltimore. My orders were issued on the 19th; the troops began to assemble on the 24th, and were encamped about one and a half miles northward of the city, at a place called Camp Fairfield.

On the 21st of July, by Major-general Smith, I was directed to take charge of this brigade, and commenced preparing for their reception. Early in August, General Winder, being vested with the command of the 10th Military District, superseded General Smith in the command.

On Saturday, August the 20th, about 1 o'clock P.M., I received by express letter No. 1, directing me to move down with my whole force for Washington.

By this morning's regimental reports, the force of my brigade, then in camp, appeared as follows:

The first regiment, under Lieutenant-colonel Ragan, officers included, 550; second regiment, under Lieutenant-colonel Shutz, officers also included, fit for duty, 803.

I immediately issued orders for wagons to be procured, provisions served out, tents struck, and every thing prepared to march that evening. But the difficulty of obtaining wagons to transport tents and camp equipage prevented my moving more than that part of the brigade this evening. The residue followed on the morning of the 21st. The advance party encamped at the Stag tavern; the rear three miles short of it, on the evening of the 21st.

About 10 o'clock P.M. I received from General Winder, by express, letter No. 2, dated the 21st, directing me to halt until further orders. August 22d, at 10 o'clock A.M., received from General Winder letter No. 3, dated at the Wood Yard the 21st, 10 o'clock P.M., directing me to advance with all speed to Bladensburg. In consequence thereof, the line of march was taken up immediately, and at 7 o'clock P.M. we arrived at Bladensburg. The first regiment encamped on the hill southeast, the second on the northwest of the town; and on Tuesday morning, the 23d, joined the first regiment on Lowndes' Hill, near Bladensburg. About 10 o'clock A.M. received from General Winder letter No. 4, dated at Head-quarters, Battalion Old Fields, August 22d, containing orders to march my brigade (with the troops under Colonel Sterett, if they had joined me) slowly toward Marlborough,

and take a position on the road not far from that place, and that he would join me some time that day.

The troops under the command of Lieutenant-colonel Sterett had not joined me, nor was I certain at that time they would arrive. The brigade was instantly put in motion, and the march commenced toward Marlborough, with a view of complying with General Winder's orders. I immediately dispatched my aid-de-camp, Major Woodyear, to General Winder, to communicate all the information which he might require as to my force; to receive particular orders as to the position I should take in the vicinity of Marlborough; and to obtain a knowledge of the country, and of the situation of the enemy. After proceeding about one mile on the road to Marlborough, I met Captain Moses Tabbs riding express to inform me that the enemy, with their whole force, had left Marlborough, and were on their march toward me, distant about six miles. This information made me determine to avail myself of the high grounds I occupied in the morning, to which I immediately returned, and made the necessary preparations to receive the enemy. I directed Captain Tabbs to return and reconnoitre the enemy, and give me every information. About 4 o'clock P.M. he returned, and informed me that the enemy, on leaving Marlborough, had taken a different route. Soon after, my aid-de-camp, Major Woodyear, returned from General Winder, and informed me that the intelligence I had received of the movements of the enemy were in part incorrect, and that General Winder wished me to encamp on the direct road from Bladensburg to Marlborough, at about seven miles distant from the latter place. The assistant adjutant-general, Major Hite, accompanied Major Woodyear.

By letter No. 4 I was first informed that Lieutenant-colonel Sterett's detachment, consisting of the fifth regiment, about five hundred strong; Major Pinkney's rifle battalion, about one hundred and fifty; and Captains Myer's and Magruder's companies of artillery, about one hundred and fifty, were attached to my command. These troops had not joined me, but were on their march. I dispatched an express with this letter to Lieutenant-colonel Sterett as soon as received, requesting him to move on with all possible expedition.

About sunset on the 23d he arrived with his command, and en-

camped near my brigade. The fatigued situation of his troops induced me to halt for the night on the hill near Bladensburg, with the intention of moving toward Marlborough at reveille on the 24th. At about 8 o'clock P.M., a militia captain, who resided near Bladensburg, came into camp, attended by one of my sentinels, and informed me he was from General Winder's camp at the Battalion Old Fields; that General Winder was not in camp when he left it, and that it was apprehended he had been taken prisoner, as he had gone out to reconnoitre the enemy and had not returned; that a detachment from the army had skirmished that day with the British; and that Brigadier-general Smith, of the District of Columbia, had taken the command of the army, and would certainly join me in the course of the night. About 11 o'clock P.M., the Secretary of State, Colonel Monroe, with several gentlemen, came to my tent; and, as well as I can recollect, Colonel Monroe observed that he was from Washington; that he had been at, or heard from the camp of General Winder; that there was an alarming silence with respect to General Winder, who had gone out to reconnoitre the enemy and had not been heard of, and it was feared he was taken; that General Smith had, by persuasion, taken the command, and that they would move toward and join me before morning, he expected, from the Battalion Old Fields, and advised vigilance to prevent surprise. Soon after the departure of Colonel Monroe, the advance pickets, on the road by which we expected the enemy, and which was the direct one from Marlborough, fired, and in a few moments my whole command were under arms and prepared for action. The cavalry, under Colonel Tilghman, who had come into town a little after dark for refreshments, were ordered down the Marlborough road, except Captain Herbert, with his troop, who was directed to push down the road toward the Battalion Old Fields until he should fall in with General Winder's army, which I was confident would join me that night.

The troops were under arms until after 2 o'clock A.M. of the 24th, when, being advised by the cavalry that the enemy were not near, I ordered them to retire to their tents, but to be ready to turn out at a moment's warning; and strong picket guards were placed on the road in every direction. Supposing my right and rear covered by General Winder's force, I felt no apprehensions of surprise

there, and no expectation that the enemy, without first beating General Winder, could approach me either by the Battalion or river road. But about half after 2 o'clock A.M., Major Bates, Assistant Adjutant-general of Militia, came to me from Washington with a message from General Winder informing me that General Winder had retreated from Battalion Old Fields into the City of Washington across the bridge, which he had ordered to be burned; and that the general expected I would resist the enemy as long as possible should he move against me in that direction. Thus was my expectation of security from the Battalion and river roads cut off, my right flank and rear uncovered, and liable to be attacked and turned, without the possibility of securing it in the position I then lay.

I instantly sent for Lieutenant-colonel Sterett of the 5th, Major Pinkney of the rifle corps, and Lieutenant-colonel Ragan, Lieutenant-colonel Shutz being present, officers in whom I placed the highest confidence, and stated to them the information and orders I had just received from General Winder, and our situation with respect to the enemy. They were unanimous in opinion that our situation on that hill could not be defended with the force then under my command, worn down by hunger and fatigue as they were, and that it was indispensably necessary for the security of the army that we should immediately retire across the bridge of Bladensburg, and take a position on the road between Bladensburg and the city which we could defend. Colonel Tilghman, of the cavalry, observed he thought we had no time to lose. In this opinion I perfectly coincided. Orders were instantly given to strike tents and prepare to march, and in about thirty minutes, without noise or confusion, the whole were in motion, and about half past three o'clock in the morning passed the bridge at Bladensburg leading to the City of Washington. Securing our rear from surprise, we halted in the road until the approach of day, with a view of finding some place where water could be had, in order that the men might cook their provisions and refresh themselves for a few moments. The provisions consisted of salt beef of inferior quality, the flour old and musty. At daylight I moved on to the foot of a hill near a brick-yard, and there ordered the troops to refresh themselves. This was about one and a half miles from Bladensburg.

Early in the morning, I had dispatched Major Woodyear to

Washington to inform General Winder of my movements and situation, of the exhausted state of the troops, and the impracticability of their meeting the enemy, in their present fatigued state, with any prospect of success, unless re-enforced. I rode to the top of the hill to examine the country. On my descending it again, a note was presented to me by an express from General Winder, dated at Washington (written, I presume, without a knowledge of my movements), directing me to oppose the enemy as long as I could should he attempt a passage by the way of Bladensburg. This note I have mislaid. I called a council of war, consisting of Lieutenant-colonel Sterett, Lieutenant-colonel Ragan, and Major Pinkney. I laid the letter before them. Colonel Sterett observed that he marched from Baltimore with a determination to defend the city; that his men, the day before, by a forced march from the Buck tavern, or Snowden's, reached Bladensburg without halting to cook; that they had been under arms nearly the whole of the night, without any sleep or food; that Major Pinkney's riflemen, and the two companies of artillery, were in the same situation; and that they were so completely worn down and exhausted that he should consider it a sacrifice of both officers and men to seek the enemy at any considerable distance from General Winder's force, as no good could result therefrom. Major Pinkney and Colonel Ragan expressed themselves to the same effect, and, with Colonel Sterett, urged the propriety of moving farther on the road toward the city, with a view of taking a stand on some more favorable ground for defence, with a better prospect of being joined by the forces under General Winder, and expressed their willingness to give their opinions in writing. I could not but admit the correctness of their views, and ordered the wagons to move on slowly toward the city, intending to follow on with the troops.

At this moment Major Woodyear returned from Washington, with positive orders from General Winder to give the enemy battle at Bladensburg, should he move that way, and that he would join me if necessary.

I immediately ordered the troops to retrace their steps to Bladensburg, determined to maintain, if possible, the ground at all hazards.

On arriving in the orchard near the mill, I directed the artillery to post themselves behind a small breastwork of dirt that lately

had been thrown up by Colonel Wadsworth. This battery commanded the pass into Bladensburg and the bridge southwesterly of the town. Our artillery consisted of six six-pounders; Major Pinkney's battalion of riflemen on their right, under cover of the town and bushes, also commanding the pass by the bridge; two companies from Lieutenant-colonel Shutz's regiment, under the command of Captains Ducker and Gorsuch, acting as riflemen, although principally armed with muskets, on the left of the artillery, near, and protected by, the barn, intended to defend the road leading by the mill, on the left of the battery, into the field; Colonel Sterett's regiment was halted in the orchard, on the right and in the rear, and the regiments of Colonels Ragan and Shutz were also halted in the orchard, in the rear and on the left flank, near the creek. My intentions were that they should remain here to refresh themselves as long as possible, and, as soon as the enemy appeared, to form Colonel Sterett's regiment (in whom I placed great confidence) on the right, their left resting on and supporting the right of Major Pinkney's riflemen, in view of the bridge and fronting the road, along which ran a fence, and act as occasion should require. Colonels Ragan's and Shutz's regiments were to be drawn up in echelon, their right resting on the left of Captains Ducker's and Gorsuch's rifle companies, in order to prevent the enemy from pressing and turning our left, hoping that General Winder would join me before the battle would commence, and occupy the ground in my rear as a second line. About 11 o'clock A.M. I was informed by a dragoon from Lieutenant-colonel Beall that he was on the road from Annapolis to Bladensburg, with about eight hundred men, distant from me about five miles, and wished to know the distance and situation of the enemy. I directed the dragoon to return and inform him that I had that moment received information that the British, with their whole force, were approaching Bladensburg by the river road, and that they were only three and a half miles distant, and advised the colonel to file off to his right and cross above Bladensburg, to fall into an old road which I understood led to our left toward Washington, and take a position on the high grounds north and northwest of Bladensburg, which would completely protect my left by preventing the enemy from outflanking us that way, and force their main body across the bridge, in the face of my artillery and riflemen on

the main road, and expose them to the fire of the 5th regiment under Colonel Sterett, who would be protected by the fence.

This advice it appeared Colonel Beall only took in part, I presume from an anxious wish to place himself between the enemy and the city. He sent his baggage off to the right, and with his troops passed the bridge at Bladensburg about thirty minutes before the enemy appeared on Mr. Lowndes' hill, and took his station on the hill, as I was informed, near the brick-kiln where we halted in the morning, about one and a half miles in my rear, and on the left of the road leading to the city. About meridian the enemy could clearly be seen making toward us by the river road.

While I was giving some directions to the artillery, [illegible]ou. Lieutenant-colonels Ragan's and Shutz's regiments had been moved from the place where I had stationed them, and marched out of the orchard up the hill, and formed in order of battle about two hundred and fifty yards above the orchard, and upward of five hundred yards in the rear of the artillery and riflemen. Thus uncovered by the trees of the orchard, their situation and numbers were clearly seen by the enemy from Lowndes' Hill, and the flanks of the artillery and riflemen unprotected, and laid liable to be turned, our main body being placed too far off to render them any aid. On riding up the hill to know who had ordered this movement, I was informed that General Winder was on the ground. At this time I met with Brigadier-general Smith, of the District of Columbia, and some conversation took place between us respecting the order of battle and seniority; the particulars I do not recollect. I immediately rode to the mill, where I understood General Winder was, and found him reconnoitring the position of the enemy. While in conversation with him, the 5th regiment was taken out of the orchard, marched up the hill, and stationed on the left of Colonel Shutz's regiment, that of Colonel Ragan being on the right, its right resting on the main road; but, as I before observed, the whole at so great a distance from the artillery and riflemen that they had to contend with the whole British force, and so much exposed that it has been a cause of astonishment they preserved their ground so long, and ultimately succeeded in retreating. Whose plan this was I know not; it was not mine, nor did it meet with my approbation; but, finding a superior officer on the ground, I concluded he had ordered it, consequently did not inter-

fere. General Winder asked me where I meant to take my station. I answered, about the centre of my brigade. He said he would take his on the left of the 5th regiment. General Winder was extremely active in giving directions and encouraging the men. I took my station in the centre of Colonels Ragan's and Shutz's regiments, but occasionally rode along the line, encouraging the men, and giving orders to the officers. Major Woodyear I directed to keep with the left of Colonel Shutz's regiment, to cheer up the men and assist the officers. Major Randall rode with me. Soon after, the action commenced by the artillery and riflemen at the battery. The fire of the artillery had great effect, and evidently produced confusion in the ranks of the enemy, who took shelter behind a warehouse, from whence they fired rockets; but a few well-directed shots drove them from this position. A flanking party, concealed by the banks and bushes, pushed up the river to turn our left, while a strong force attempted the bridge; but the incessant and well-directed fire from our artillery and riflemen at the battery occasioned evident confusion among their ranks, so much so that their officers could be seen actively engaged preventing their retreating, and pushing them on to the bridge; and here I think the enemy suffered considerably. At length they succeeded in passing the bridge in small parties at full speed, which formed after crossing. I had ordered forty horsemen with axes to cut away this bridge before the near approach of the enemy, and saw them with their axes. Why this order was not executed I never could learn. It is certain the enemy could have forded the stream above; but I considered it would, in some degree, impede their progress, and give our artillery and riflemen more time and opportunity to act with effect against them.

The artillery, under the command of Captains Myer and Magruder, and the riflemen, the whole under the command of Major Pinkney, behaved in the most gallant manner (this gallant officer in the course of the action was severely wounded), but the superior force of the enemy, and the rapidity with which he moved, compelled them to retire; but one of the pieces was lost, and this was rendered harmless before it was abandoned.

The enemy took every advantage of the cover afforded them by the trees of the orchard, and their light troops from thence kept up a galling fire upon our line. On this party, when advanced

nearer, the 5th regiment, under Colonel Sterett, opened a steady and well-directed fire, which was followed by the fire from the right, and ultimately from our centre, when the firing on both sides became general. After a few rounds, the troops on the right began to break. I rode along the line, and gave orders to the officers to cut down those who attempted to fly, and suffer no man to leave the lines. On arriving at the left of the centre regiment, I found Lieutenant-colonel Shutz's men giving way, and that brave officer, with Major Kemp, aided by my aid-de-camp, Major Woodyear, exerting themselves in rallying and forming them again. Captain Gallaway's company and part of Captains Shower's and Randall's companies were rallied and formed again, and behaved gallantly. The rest of Colonels Shutz's and Ragan's regiments fled in disorder, notwithstanding the extraordinary exertions of their officers to prevent it. On the left I soon after discovered a part of the 5th regiment giving way, and that excellent officer, Lieutenant-colonel Sterett, with those under him, most actively engaged forming them again. Soon after the retreat became general, and all attempts to rally them, and make a second stand, were fruitless. With a body of United States cavalry, I endeavored to protect the rear and right of the retreating men, so as to prevent their falling into the enemy's possession.

The men under my command were worn down and nearly exhausted from long and forced marches, want of food, and watching. They had been, with very little intermission, under arms and marching from the time of their departure from Baltimore, with but little sleep, bad provisions, and but little opportunity to cook. They certainly were not in a condition to go into battle; but my orders were positive, and I was determined to obey them.

Before and during the action, I did not see any of the force I was led to expect would support me. I understood since that they were on their way to my assistance, and I presume exertions were made to bring them up.

Before and during the retreat I heard the thunder of Commodore Barney's artillery, but till then I did not know he was near. I believe there were few, if any other, troops in the field when the action commenced than the three regiments of infantry under Lieutenant-colonels Sterett, Ragan, and Shutz, Major Pinkney's battalion of riflemen, Captains Myer's and Magruder's companies of ar-

tillery, amounting to about 2150 men, exclusive of two regiments of cavalry, who did not act.

General Winder, on the field of battle, displayed all possible zeal, activity, and personal bravery in encouraging the men to fight, and after they broke, in his exertions to rally them.

I saw the President and some of the heads of departments in the field, but did not perceive that any of them took any part in the arrangements made for battle. Colonel Monroe, the then Secretary of State, appeared extremely active in his efforts to aid the officers in the discharge of their duties, and exposed himself to much danger.

To my aid-de-camp, Major Edward G. Woodyear, and my acting Brigade-major, Major Beall Randall, I am much indebted for their unremitted exertions in encouraging the men before and during the action, and the zeal displayed by them in their attempts to keep the ranks unbroken and to rally the men, in which they in some degree succeeded; for the company of Captain Galloway, and part of Shower's and Randall's were rallied, and were among the last troops who left the field, and did not retreat until directed; some of them were killed, and several severely wounded.

On arriving at the city, with part of Colonel Laval's United States cavalry covering the retreat, and collecting the rear of our scattered troops, I found General Winder's command had passed through it toward Georgetown. I proceeded there, and then followed to a village a few miles beyond it, where I overtook him with troops collecting under his command, and some of those of my brigade. The army thence proceeded to Montgomery Court House on the 25th of August, where it was hourly re-enforced by those who fled from the field.

As there had been no place assigned by the commanding general previous to the action to which the men should retreat in case of a defeat, many of those under my immediate command had fled from the field toward Baltimore.

On the 25th I directed my aid, Major Woodyear, to push on from Montgomery Court House to that place, organize the drafted men, and bring them on to any point that General Winder should direct.

On Friday, August 26, at about 10 o'clock A.M., we took up

the line of march from Montgomery Court House on the road leading to Baltimore, with the United States infantry under Lieutenant-colonel Scott; Major Peter's corps of artillery; General Smith's brigade of District troops; the regiment of militia from Annapolis and Anne Arundel County, commanded by Lieutenant-colonels Beall and Hood; some riflemen from Frederick, Alleghany, and other places; a large body of cavalry, and part of my brigade of drafted militia—a force respectable as to numbers and appearance; and that night encamped about half way between Montgomery Court House and Ellicott's upper mills. General Winder, having received some information respecting the enemy indicating intentions of moving against Baltimore, concluded his presence there was indispensable. He set out for that place, leaving me in command of the army, with directions to follow him in the morning. Colonel Monroe was with us.

During this night several expresses arrived from the City of Washington, by whom I was informed of the retreat of the enemy, said to be in such haste and confusion that many of their soldiers were straggling about in every direction; that the main army, after reaching Bladensburg, had taken the road to Marlborough, leaving their wounded. I ordered the cavalry to follow them, harass their rear, and pick up the stragglers. Reports from Georgetown and the city reached me that the arms of many of the enemy had fallen into the hands of the blacks, and it was apprehended that they would take advantage of the absence of the men to insult the females, and complete the work of destruction commenced by the enemy; and at the earnest solicitation of Brigadier-general Smith and Major Peter, who expressed much anxiety respecting their families, and considering it all-important to prevent further injury to the city, I ordered the troops of the District of Columbia to move thither for its protection.

Having ascertained that the enemy had retreated to their shipping, I ordered the Prince George's troops down to Bladensburg, and those under the command of Lieutenant-colonels Beall and Hood to remain encamped on the ground then occupied until they had orders from General Winder; and in the morning of the 27th, with the United States infantry, my brigade, and part of Colonel Laval's cavalry, marched for Baltimore in a very heavy rain. On my arrival there in the evening I waited on General Winder, and

detailed to him what I had done since he left me, with which he appeared well pleased.

Before I conclude, I must observe that Major Pinkney, with most of his battalion, and part of the two companies of artillery, retired from their advanced position to the left of the 5th regiment, and with that regiment continued to behave with that gallantry which had distinguished them in the onset, and only retired when pressed by superior numbers, and then, as I am informed, by orders from the commanding general.

TOBIAS E. STANSBURY.

Hon. R. M. Johnson, Chairman, &c., &c.

No. III.

STATEMENT OF GENERAL WALTER SMITH.

SIR,—In compliance with the request contained in your favor of the 28th ult., inclosing a copy of a resolution of the honorable the House of Representatives of the United States, appointing a committee to investigate the causes which led to the success of the enemy in his late enterprise against this city, I have the honor respectfully to submit for the consideration of the committee the following detailed report as connected with the inquiry, and embracing, as you wish, a view of the numbers, the movements, the conduct, and disposition of the troops of Washington and Georgetown under my command, from the period they were called into service until the 24th of August, the disastrous day of battle at Bladensburg, together with such facts and circumstances relative to the subject as present themselves.

Late at night on the 18th of August, I received orders to call out the whole of the brigade under my command, to rendezvous on the evening of the following day on the banks of the Tiber, in Washington, and to report to General Winder. The troops assembled according to orders, but, being deficient in many essential supplies for actual service, were, after an inspection, dismissed until the ensuing morning, the 20th, when, every exertion on the part of the officers being made to perfect their equipment, they moved off from the Capitol about 3 P.M., crossed the Eastern Branch, and halted four miles therefrom on the road leading to Nottingham. They

were here overtaken by the baggage, when it was ascertained there was a great deficiency of necessary camp equipage, the public stores being exhausted; many of the troops were compelled to lie out in the open field; and of the essential article of flints, upon a requisition of one thousand, only two hundred could be had. Means were immediately adopted to supply the latter defect from private resources; the former was never accomplished. On the following morning, the 21st, the militia companies deficient in numbers were consolidated, and the supernumerary officers detached to bring up delinquents. The force on the ground amounted to about one thousand and seventy, comprised into two regiments, commanded by Colonels Magruder and Brent, and consisting of the following description of troops: two companies of artillery, twelve six-pounders, and two hundred and ten men; two companies of riflemen, nominally, but *armed with muskets*, the Secretary of War having declined or refused to furnish rifles, one hundred and seventy men; one company of grenadiers, forty men; and five companies of light infantry, about two hundred and fifty men: in all, about six hundred and seventy of volunteers, the residue common militia. Having here done all that could be done for the organization of the troops, and to enable them to move with celerity, they were, according to previous orders from General Winder, put in motion, and after a hot and fatiguing march, encamped that evening after dusk near the Wood Yard. At this place I found the United States 36th regiment, Lieutenant-colonel Scott, about three hundred and fifty strong, and a squadron of cavalry under the command of Lieutenant-colonel Tilghman; the latter soon after moved off to reconnoitre on the different roads between the Wood Yard, Marlborough, and Nottingham. While the troops were occupying the ground, I received a message from General Winder, then at the Wood Yard, requesting an interview at his quarters; after which I returned to camp at 9 o'clock, and again at his request joined him at 12, where Colonel Monroe soon after arrived with the intelligence of the arrival at Nottingham (distant about twelve miles) of the enemy in considerable force, both by land and water. I received orders immediately to return to camp, and hold the troops in readiness to march at the shortest notice, and was instructed by General Winder to direct Lieutenant-colonel Scott, of the 36th United States regiment, to get his men imme-

diately under arms, and to march according to orders previously given him. I reached the camp about 2 o'clock A.M.; the troops were roused, the tents struck, the baggage-wagons loaded, and the men got immediately under arms, and so remained until sunrise the 22d, when General Winder arrived and directed an advanced corps to be formed and march immediately, to consist of about three hundred men, artillerists and infantry. This was promptly done, and placed under the direction of Major Peter, consisting of his own artillery, Captain Davidson's light infantry, and Captain Stull's rifle corps, *armed with muskets*. They moved immediately on the road to Nottingham, and were soon after followed by the main body to support them. Major Peter, with the advance corps, moved on for four or five miles, when he fell in with Colonel Lavall's cavalry, a part of Colonel Tilghman's, and the 36th United States regiment retiring. The troops were halted, and a position taken to repel the enemy, now rapidly approaching. General Winder here joined our troops, and soon after orders were given to fall back, which was done. The main body had meanwhile arrived at a position within two miles of the advance, where they found the marine corps, under the command of Captain Miller, with five pieces of heavy artillery, judiciously posted.

This position not being deemed favorable for the infantry, they were directed to rest on their arms, while I rode briskly forward to discover one more adapted to them; but none presented, except for light troops, a body of which was thrown in advance into the woods, and the residue of the troops disposed of to act according to circumstances. Here we received advice, about 11 o'clock, of the advance of the enemy and of the retiring of our advance troops, and, immediately after, orders from General Winder to send off the baggage from where it had been left in the morning to the "Long Old Fields," and for the troops to retire slowly upon the same road. About this time successive heavy explosions from the direction of Marlborough announced the destruction of Commodore Barney's flotilla, which was known to be in that vicinity, and also that this course would be adopted should the enemy approach in such force by land and water as to render resistance unavailing. It was hence inferred that the enemy had ascended the Patuxent in force; that a column of troops had co-operated by taking the road in that direction, which was soon aft-

erward confirmed; and, with the advices subsequently, that the whole of their army had filed off on that road, and taken possession of Marlborough. Our troops halted, and assembled at the fork of the roads on this side of the Wood Yard, one of which leads to Marlborough, the other to this place. We here fell in with Commodore Barney and his sailors, and, after a short rest, the whole moved on, and about 4 P.M. arrived at the Long Old Fields. Here, pursuant to directions from General Winder, I assumed the command of the assembled forces, those of Commodore Barney excepted, consisting now of the following troops, viz.: District volunteers and militia, one thousand and seve ty; Lieutenant-colonel Scott's 36th United States regiment, three hundred and fifty; Lieutenant-colonel Kramer's battalion of drafted militia, two hundred and forty; and Major Waring's battalion of Prince George's militia, about one hundred and fifty: total, about eighteen hundred men. An encampment was formed for the night, and such positions taken as were best calculated to resist a night attack; the cavalry being already stationed in advance on the different roads leading to Marlborough, with orders to keep patrolling parties constantly upon the enemy's quarters, and to advise of all his movements. The troops, being greatly fatigued, sought in sleep that repose they so much wanted. In this they were disappointed. An alarm gun aroused them about 2 o'clock in the morning of the 23d. They were quickly formed in the front of their encampment, and dispositions made to meet and repel the expected attack; but in a short time it was ascertained to be a false alarm, and the troops were dismissed, but with orders to hold themselves ready for their posts at a moment's warning. At daylight General Winder gave orders to have the tents struck and the baggage-wagons loaded, and that the whole should be ready to move in one hour. Those orders were complied with with all possible expedition. Shortly after the troops were got under arms, and were joined by another small detachment of Prince George's militia, under the command of Major Maynard, about one hundred and fifty. The whole were held ready to move according to orders. About this time I received directions from General Winder to have formed an advance corps, constructed as the one of the preceding day, and be prepared to move as his subsequent orders should designate. Peter's, Davidson's, and Stull's companies were again se-

lected for this purpose, and formed accordingly. The President of the United States, accompanied by the Secretary of War and others of his cabinet, now came upon the ground, and reviewed the troops. About 10 o'clock General Winder left the camp, accompanied by, and having under his command or direction, several troops of cavalry, intending to reconnoitre on the road leading from Marlborough to Bladensburg, as well as to be situated in a position where he might more conveniently communicate with the troops expected from Baltimore, leaving directions that I should report to him at the Cross Roads, it being the intersection of a road proceeding from the Old Fields, and crossing the before-mentioned road, about five miles distant. His orders were that the advance troops should move forward in the direction of Marlborough, reconnoitre the enemy, approach him as near as possible without running too much risk, and to annoy him either in his position or in his movements by all the means in their power, and that I should remain with the main body at the Old Fields, and act according to the intelligence I should receive of the movements of the enemy. If they moved upon Bladensburg by the road before-mentioned, that I should approach them by the intersecting road from the Old Fields, and attack their left flank, or if upon the road we now occupied, that we should make the best possible dispositions in our power, and receive him there, unless circumstances imperiously forbade; otherwise to retire by a road in our rear to Bladensburg or to Washington, as at the time should seem most advisable. In conformity with this arrangement, Major Peter, with the advance corps and with Captain Caldwell's cavalry, which had joined us, marched about 11 o'clock. About a quarter of a mile in front of our then camp the road forks, both leading to Marlborough, one on the main stage-road, by which the distance was about eight miles, the other turning to the left, a more direct route, but not so good a road, about six miles. This last-mentioned road was taken by our advancing troops. The commander was instructed to report every hour. The residue of our troops were dismissed to refresh. From this period until 2 o'clock several deserters and prisoners were brought into camp, and I was engaged in examining them when intelligence was received from Major Peter that the enemy had left Marlborough, and were advancing rapidly upon the road which we then occupied in great

force; that, according to his estimation of their column, and the best information he could obtain, their force was not less than six thousand men; that he had had a skirmish with them, in which they had endeavored to outflank him, and that he was then retiring before them. A part of Colonel Laval's cavalry, having then joined us, were immediately detached to cover the retreat, and the whole of our troops ordered under arms. Conferring with Commodore Barney on the subject, I proposed making a stand in our then position, with which, with his characteristic gallantry, he promptly acquiesced, professing his willingness to co-operate in any measures that might be deemed most advisable. The troops were immediately formed in order of battle, extending nearly a quarter of a mile on each side of the road; those of Commodore Barney, with his heavy artillery, the marines under Captain Miller, and the 36th United States regiment, being posted on the right of the road; the District troops, and the residue of those attached to them, on the left—our advanced troops, as they arrived, taking their stations in the line, and the artillery, in which it was ascertained we were greatly their superior, and for which the ground was admirably adapted, so posted as to have the best effect; indeed, so strong did we deem our position in front that we were apprehensive that the enemy, upon viewing us, would forbear to assail us by daylight, or that, availing of his numbers, he would endeavor to outflank us. To guard against this last, parties of light troops and cavalry were detached to cover both flanks. We remained thus two or three hours calmly awaiting the approach of the enemy, our vedettes successively announcing his continued progress. About 5 P.M., General Winder, who had been apprised of the approach of the enemy, arrived in camp. He examined the different positions, and approved of them; but the day being now nearly spent, and it being ascertained that the enemy had not arrived within a distance in which he would now probably be able to make his attack while it lasted, and it being deemed unadvisable to receive a night attack there, when our advantage of artillery would be unavailing, he gave the orders to retire about sunset, and the whole of the troops, much wearied and exhausted, encamped late in the night within this city.

Thus terminated the four days of service of the troops of this District preceding the affair at Bladensburg. They had been un-

der arms, with but little intermission, the whole of the time, both night and day; had traversed, during their different marches in advance and retreat, a considerable tract of country, exposed to the burning heat of a sultry sun by day, and many of them to the cold dews of the night, uncovered. They had, in this period, drawn but two rations, the requisition therefor, in the first instance, having been but partially complied with, and it being afterward almost impossible to procure the means of transportation, the wagons employed by our quartermaster for that purpose being constantly impressed by the government agents for the purpose of removing the public records when the enemy's approach was known, and some of them thus seized while proceeding to take in provisions for the army.

Those hardships and privations could not be but severely distressing to men, the greater part of whom possessed and enjoyed at home the means of comfortable living, and from their usual habits and pursuits in life but ill qualified to endure them. They, however, submitted without murmuring, evincing by their patience, their zeal, and the promptitude with which they obeyed every order, a magnanimity highly honorable to their character. Great as was their merit in this respect, it was no less so in the spirit manifested whenever an order was given to march to meet the foe; and at the "Long Old Fields," where his attack was momently expected in overwhelming force, they displayed, in presence of many spectators, although scarcely any of them had ever been in action, a firmness, a resolution, and an intrepidity which, whatever might have been the result, did honor to their country.

On Wednesday morning, the 24th of August, at 11 A.M., I received orders from General Winder to detach one piece of artillery and one company of infantry to repair to the Eastern Branch Bridge, and there report to Colonel Wadsworth; and to proceed with the residue of the troops to Bladensburg, and take a position to support General Stansbury. This order was put in immediate execution, and the troops for Bladensburg moved off with all the expedition of which they were capable. Having put them in motion, I passed on ahead, in order that I might select my position against their arrival. I found General Stansbury posted on the west side of the Eastern Branch, his right resting on the main road, distant from the bridge at Bladensburg five or six hundred

yards, and extending northeastwardly, his left approaching nearer to the creek. An extensive apple-orchard was in his front, and, one hundred to two hundred yards in advance, a work thrown up, commanding the bridge, occupied by a corps of artillerists with five or six pieces, and appeared to be supported by some rifle and light companies. In his rear, on the right, was a thick undergrowth of wood, and directly behind that a deep hollow or ravine, open or cleared, of about sixty yards in width, which the main road crosses. The ravine terminates on the left in a bold acclivity, about two hundred yards from the road; the rest of the ground in his rear was open, unbroken, and gradually ascending fields. Having hastily examined the grounds, and concluded on the dispositions I should make, I apprised General Stansbury of my views as to the troops under my command, suggesting that, if his line should be forced and he could again form on my left, the nature of the ground there would be favorable for a renewal of the action, which might then become general. By this time we received advice that the enemy were near Bladensburg, and I left him to hasten the arrival of my troops. They moved rapidly on, notwithstanding the excessive heat of the day, covered with clouds of dust, and were promptly disposed of as follows: Lieutenant-colonel Scott, with the 36th U. S. regiment, was posted in a field on the left of the road, his right resting upon it, and commanding the road descending into the ravine before mentioned, in the rear of General Stansbury's right, and the rest of his line commanding the ascent from the ravine. This position was about one hundred and fifty yards in the rear of the front line, but extending to the right.* In the same field, about one hundred yards in the rear of the 36th regiment, Colonel Magruder was posted with a part of the 1st regiment of District militia, his right also resting upon the road, the left advanced, presenting a front obliquely to the road, and situated to cover and co-operate with the 36th regiment; Major Peter, with his artillery, six six-pounders; Captain Davidson's light infantry, and Captain Stull's rifle corps, *armed with muskets*, all of the same regiment, were ordered to take possession of the abrupt acclivity before mentioned, terminating the ravine. This was deemed a desirable position, because it commanded completely the ravine and the road crossing it, and a considerable extent of the ground over which the front line would necessarily re-

tire if forced back; but, after a short space of time, report was made to me that broken grounds interrupted the approach to it with artillery but by a circuitous route that would consume much time, and that, in case of retreat, the ground in the rear was such as might endanger the safety of the guns. It was mentioned, at the same time, that near to it was a commanding position for artillery, and easy of access from and to the road. I yielded with reluctance to the abandonment of the position first ordered, but time did not admit of hesitation. Meanwhile I had posted Lieutenant-colonel Kramer, with his battalion of Maryland drafted militia, in the woods on the right of the road, and commanding the ravine which continued in that direction, with orders that, if forced, he should retire, by his right, through a body of woods in that direction, and rally and form with the troops stationed in the rear, on the extreme right. Upon examining the position taken by Major Peter's battery, it was found that the range of his guns was principally through that part of the field occupied by the 36th regiment. To remove one or the other became necessary, and the difficulty of the ground for moving artillery, and the exigency of the movement left no alternative. The 36th fell back about one hundred yards, losing, in some measure, the advantage of its elevated ground, and leaving the road. The position of the 1st regiment District militia, from this circumstance, was also necessarily changed. It fell back about the same distance, its right still resting on the road, and now formed nearly in line with the 36th. Of the 2d regiment District militia, two pieces of artillery and one company of riflemen, armed with muskets, were, by directions of General Winder, sent on to the front; with these he flanked the extreme left of the front line; two pieces more of artillery were posted in the road near the bridge at Bladensburg; the residue of that regiment, about three hundred and fifty strong, under the command of Colonel Brent, was formed as a reserve a short distance in the rear of Major Peter's battery, and so disposed as to act on the right, or left, or in front, as occasion might require. Near them was posted, in the same manner, Major Waring's Prince George's battalion of militia, about one hundred and fifty. Colonel William D. Beall, with a regiment of troops from Annapolis, passed through Bladensburg as our troops arrived, and took a position on the right of the road and nearly fronting it, at a distance

of about two hundred and fifty yards. Previous to the arrival of the troops on the ground, General Winder came up from the city, and, being made acquainted with the intended dispositions of the troops, as well as the ground reserved for Commodore Barney and the marines, approved of and confirmed them.

About half past twelve o'clock, and while the troops were yet taking their different positions, innumerable rockets, thrown from the heights at Bladensburg, announced the arrival of the enemy there; and at this period Commodore Barney's sailors and marines, in quick march, arrived, and took possession of the ground previously assigned them, his artillery being posted in and near the road upon its right, commanding the road and open field in front; and his infantry, together with the marines under Captain Miller, extending to the right, thus occupying the interval of ground between Colonel Magruder's 1st regiment District militia and Colonel Beall's Maryland regiment. The firing of artillery in front soon commenced, and immediately after that of musketry, in quick and rapid succession. In a few minutes the whole right and centre of the front line, with some small exceptions, were seen retiring in disorder and confusion. The firing still continued on the extreme left, but shortly after it also broke, and, although it retired in more order, yet none could be rallied so as to renew the action with effect, and also soon entirely quitted the field.

Meanwhile the left of the enemy, in heavy column, passed along the road crossing the ravine. They were here encountered by the troops of Colonel Kramer, posted in the woods on the edge of the ravine. These, after a short conflict, were compelled to retire, which they did principally under cover of the adjacent woods, and formed with the troops of Colonel Beall on the right. The enemy's column now displayed in the field on the right of the road. They here became exposed to the oblique fire of Major Peter's battery, which was kept up with great animation. Still pressing on to the front of our right, they came in contact with the heavy artillery of Commodore Barney, and of the troops posted there. Here the firing became tremendous. They were repulsed, again returned to the charge, succeeded in forcing the troops on the right, and finally carried the position of Commodore Barney.

The dispersion of the front line caused a dangerous opening on our left, of which the enemy in that quarter promptly availed.

He advanced rapidly; then, wheeling on his left, soon gained, and was turning our left flank. To oppose this alarming movement, I directed Colonel Brent, with the 2d regiment of District militia, to take a position still more to the left; and he was proceeding in the execution of this order, when orders came from General Winder for the whole of the troops to retreat. The efforts of the enemy had hitherto been directed principally against the right and left of our whole line of battle. The troops of this District, and a part of those attached to them, occupying positions mostly in the centre, and some of them difficult of access, were consequently but partially engaged, and this principally with light troops and skirmishers, now pressing forward, supported by a column of infantry.

I here beg leave to refer to the reports of Colonels Brent and Thompson, Nos. 1 and 2, showing the positions, and the part taken by their respective commands during the action.

The order to retreat was executed by regiments and corps, as they had been formed, and with as much order as the nature of the ground would permit. The first and second regiments halted and formed, after retreating five or six hundred paces, but were again ordered by General Winder to retire. At this moment I fell in with General Winder, and, after a short conference with him, was directed to move on and collect the troops, and prepare to make a stand on the heights westward of the turnpike gate. This was done as fast as the troops came up. A front was again presented toward the enemy, consisting principally of the troops of this District, a part of those who had been attached to them in the action, and a Virginia regiment of about four hundred men, under Colonel Minor, which met us at this place. While the line was yet forming, I received orders from General Winder to fall back to the Capitol, and there form for battle. I took the liberty of suggesting my impression of the preferable situation we then occupied; but, expecting that he might be joined there by some of the dispersed troops of the front line, he chose to make the stand there. Approaching the Capitol, I halted the troops, and requested his orders as to the formation of the line. We found no auxiliaries there. He then conferred for a few moments with General Armstrong, who was a short distance from us, and then gave orders that the whole should retreat through Washington and Georgetown. It is impossible to do justice to the anguish evinced

by the troops of Washington and Georgetown on the receiving of this order. The idea of leaving their families, their houses, and their homes at the mercy of an enraged enemy was insupportable. To preserve that order which was maintained during the retreat was now no longer practicable. As they retired through Washington and Georgetown, numbers were obtaining and taking leave to visit their homes, and then again rejoining; and with ranks thus broken and scattered, they halted at night on the heights near Tenleytown, and on the ensuing day assembled at Montgomery Court House.

I have thus, sir, given a detailed, and what will, I apprehend, in many respects, be deemed too minute an account of the short tour of service of the District troops under my command which preceded the capture of this capital. I fear its length may trespass too much on the patience of your honorable committee. I thought it, however, due to the occasion, and conformable to the spirit and purport of your inquiries. I had another object. The troops of Washington and Georgetown have been assailed, in the public prints and elsewhere, with calumnies as unmerited as they are cruel and wanton. They have heard of them with indignant astonishment. Conscious that in no instance have they been wanting in the duty they owed to their country or to themselves, but, on the contrary, in obedience to the call of their government, have with alacrity obeyed its orders, and intrepidly fronted an enemy vastly their superior in force, and never yielded the ground to him but by orders emanating from superior authority, they can not restrain the feelings excited by such manifest, such unprovoked injustice. They have seen with satisfaction the resolution of Congress to inquire into this subject, and, persuaded of the justice and impartiality of your honorable committee, entertain a confident assurance that the result of your investigation will afford relief to their injured feelings. Connected with this subject, I beg leave to refer to a letter of General Winder, No. 3, in answer to an inquiry made of him as to the general conduct of the brigade while under his command.

I have the honor to be, etc., W. SMITH,
Brigadier-general 1st Columbian brigade.

Hon. R. M. Johnson.

P.S.—I ought to have mentioned that parts of two companies

of the United States 12th and 38th regiments were attached to the 36th regiment, under Lieutenant-colonel Scott. Previous to the march to Bladensburg, eighty men of his command had been stationed near the Eastern Branch Bridge, and did not join until after the action. His force then was less than three hundred men.

W. S.

No. IV.

COLONEL GEORGE MINOR'S STATEMENT.

In answer to the several interrogatories made by Colonel R. M. Johnson, chairman of the committee of inquiry into the causes of the destruction of the public buildings in the City of Washington, as hereunto annexed, state as follows, viz. :

On Friday, the 19th of August last, was informed (not officially) of the collecting of the enemy's forces in our waters, namely, the Potomac and Patuxent. Immediately issued orders for the regiment under my command to assemble at Wren's tavern on the Tuesday following, it being the nearest point of the county of Fairfax to the city; and on Sunday, the 21st, received orders, through Brigadier-general Douglas, to repair with a detachment of ninety men, that had been previously placed in detail, to march at a moment's warning, to the aid of General Hungerford, whose head-quarters were in the counties of Westmoreland, King George, or Northumberland; and to make one other requisition of one hundred and forty men, exclusive of officers, and order them to the aid of General Winder, City of Washington. And on Monday evening, the 22d, received a verbal message from the President, by Mr. John Graham, to hasten on the troops which had been ordered from my regiment, which will more fully appear by said Graham's letter to General Winder, to which I beg leave to refer the committee; and, after informing Mr. Graham the purport of the orders I had received, we both concluded it would be proper for him to return to Washington, and have the orders first alluded to countermanded, so as to justify me in marching with my whole force to the city, which consisted, as well as I can recollect, of six hundred infantry and about one hundred cavalry; and the said Graham returned to Wren's tavern on Tuesday evening, the 23d, with General Winder's orders, written on the same letter to which

I have referred the committee, on the receipt of which I took up my line of march immediately, and arrived at the Capitol between sunset and dark, and immediately made my way to the President and reported my arrival, when he referred me to General Armstrong, to whom I repaired, and informed him as to the strength of the troops, as well as to the want of arms, ammunition, etc., which made it as late as early candle-light, when I was informed by that gentleman the arms, etc., could not be had that night, and directed me to report myself next morning to Colonel Carberry, who would furnish me with arms, etc., which gentleman, from early next morning, I diligently sought for, until a late hour of the forenoon, without being able to find him, and then went in search of General Winder, whom I found near the Eastern Branch, when he gave an order to the armorer for the munitions wanting, with orders to return to the Capitol, there to await further orders.

On my arrival at the armory, found that department in the care of a very young man, who dealt out the stores cautiously, which went greatly to consume time; as, for instance, when flints were once counted by my officers, who showed every disposition to expedite the furnishing the men, the young man had to count them over again before they could be obtained; and at which place I met with Colonel Carberry, who introduced himself to me, and apologized for not being found when I was in search of him, stating he had left town the evening before, and had gone to his seat in the country. After getting the men equipped, I ordered them on to the Capitol, and waited myself to sign the receipts for the munitions furnished; and, on my arrival, was informed by Major Hunter, who commanded in my absence, orders had been given to march to Bladensburg, when we took up our march for that place, and met the retreating army on this side the turnpike gate; and was ordered by one of General Winder's aids to form the line of battle on a height near that place, and was soon after ordered by the general in person to throw back my regiment from that position into sections, and to wait until the retreating army had passed, and cover their retreat; and immediately after sent his aid to direct me to countermarch immediately, and come to the Capitol.

After returning there, halted the troops to wait further orders, until General Winder directed me to march them on, without telling me where; of course I marched with the other troops until I

came to the Six Buildings, where I took the left-hand road, leading to the foundry, and there occupied the nearest height to that place, and sent the adjutant to find where the general had made his rallying-point, and was informed at Tenleytown, where I marched that evening, and found the troops moving off to encamp at some convenient place on the river road, where I followed on until I saw two barns, where I made to, and rested for the night. Next morning sought for General Winder; met him on the road leading from Tenleytown to where my troops lay, when he ordered me to Montgomery Court House, and from thence to Baltimore.

Given under my hand, City of Washington, 30th of October, 1814.

GEORGE MINOR,
Colonel-commandant 60th regiment Virginia militia.

No. V.

FROM MAJOR GEORGE PETER TO COLONEL J. S. WILLIAMS.

Montanverd, May 24, 1854.

DEAR SIR,—Your communication of the 18th instant has been duly received. After the unfortunate affair of Bladensburg I was called upon by Colonel R. M. Johnson, appointed chairman of a committee of Congress to investigate the capture of Washington. I declined making any communication. Cabinet ministers, rival candidates for the presidency (Monroe and Armstrong), generals, field-officers, captains, and subalterns, and citizens, had all made communications to the chairman and his committee, presenting such a variety of views and statements connected with the operations of the U. S. army, and the landing and advance of the British army under the command of General Ross, that I felt convinced it would be impossible for any committee to make such a report as would embrace a true statement of the military operations connected with the capture of Washington.

I still most reluctantly make any statements; and but for various publications, doing great injustice to many portions of the army, and misstatements of facts, I would not be induced, at this late period, to present my recollections of the operations of that day to you.

It is well-known to all connected with the army on that occa-

sion, that the *advance* was under my immediate command, which gave me an opportunity of knowing as much connected with the operations as any other officer connected with the army. I was the *first* to meet the enemy, and the *last* piece of artillery fired at the battle of Bladensburg was from my battery, after I had received an order, through you, from General Smith to retreat.

To enter into all the details and movements would be more than I can undertake by letter; but if you can make it convenient to visit me, I would go more into general details, and relate many circumstances that are too voluminous for my letter-communication.

It is not my intention to impute blame or censure to any one. A want of military experience was the groundwork of all the errors committed in the military operations of that day. Winder and Armstrong were both loudly condemned and charged with things that both, in my opinion, were innocent of. The great defect was the want of *military experience*. From General Armstrong I received every equipment that was necessary to render my corps efficient in every respect, while many complained of their inability to procure such arms and equipments as were necessary to render them efficient; and I personally know that Stull's rifle corps were supplied with *muskets* instead of their proper arms.* No sooner was it announced that the enemy had arrived at Benedict, than I was sent for by the Secretary of War, and was offered the appointment of colonel, and the command of volunteer corps in the District of Columbia. I was aware of the jealousy and heart-burning that it would create with the officers commanding militia regiments to have the volunteer companies of their several regiments taken from them at the moment that they expected to meet the enemy, and recommended things to be left as they were, and I would continue to command the artillery, and Stull and Davidson's companies, which had been with me on more occasions than one.

The first error committed was in detaining my artillery and other troops, which were in a state of readiness for moving, two days from the City of Washington, until the body of the militia could be furnished with the necessary equipments to take the field. You

* It is personally known to the author that rifles were *refused* to this corps, which caused great excitement and indignation at the time.

will recollect the nights of the 22d and 23d. My detachment was kept under order to move toward Nottingham. The order to march was given about sunrise on the morning of the 22d. Having halted for a few moments in advance of the "Wood Yard," to enable the troops to get water to drink, Captain Edward G. Williams, of the cavalry, approached in great haste, and said he "had been detached for the purpose of procuring axes to fell trees across the road to obstruct the advance of the enemy." In a moment my troops were in marching order. I proceeded but a short distance, when I met Colonel Tilghman or your brother, Lieutenant-colonel Otho H. Williams, commanding some two hundred cavalry, retiring to get on the road which led to Ranter's tavern, General Winder being under the impression that the enemy contemplated an attack upon Fort Washington. This was the great error committed by General Winder on that day. I was also advised to fall back, but as my instructions were to advance until I met General Winder or the enemy, I continued on my course.

A short time afterward I met Lieutenant-colonel Wm. Scott at the head of the regular troops, also retiring. I told him what my orders were, and that I should continue to advance. He very promptly said he "was a young officer of but little experience, and would most cheerfully co-operate in any movements that I made. I continued to advance until I came in sight of Oden's house, where I found the enemy posted. There I made a disposition to meet the enemy: Stull and Davidson upon the *right*, my six pieces of artillery in the centre, guns loaded, matches lighted, and Scott, with the regulars, upon the *left*. I had occupied this position but a short time, when General Winder arrived, complimented me for the position I occupied, but considered we were not in sufficient force to meet the enemy, and advised that we should fall back and occupy a new position. We did so, General Winder accompanying us. We had hardly taken possession of the new position, when we heard the reports of the explosion of Barney's flotilla. If General Winder, instead of detaching the cavalry, had employed this regiment under Colonel Tilghman, the regiment of infantry under Colonel Scott, my six pieces of artillery, and the two light companies of Stull and Davidson, and had marched and attacked their rear, I do not believe the enemy ever would have reached Washington. But the general had taken up the impres-

sion that the enemy first contemplated the capture of Fort Washington, to enable their fleet to pass up the Potomac, and the capture of Washington was contemplated by the joint operations of the fleet and army. This I looked upon as the great error of the campaign; for the troops composing the army of General Winder were better calculated to meet the enemy by *detachments* than in any *general* engagement, the most of them being militia, concentrated on the spur of the occasion, with little or no military experience. I was ordered to fall back and join the concentration of the army at "Long Old Fields." In returning, I saw where General Smith, in advance of the "Wood Yard," had occupied a position, calculating upon the advance of the enemy by that route. On my arrival at "Long Old Fields," in addition to Smith's brigade, I found the flotilla-men under Commodore Barney, with a battery of two eighteen-pounders, and the marines under the command of their gallant leader, Captain (late Colonel) Miller. You will recollect, during the nights of the 22d and 23d, the constant alarms by guns being fired by the sentinels during the night, always the result of an army composed principally of raw militia. During the morning of the 23d Mr. Madison and his cabinet arrived in camp. About 8 or 9 o'clock I was sent for by General Winder. The President and cabinet were with him, when he informed me that there were such various accounts of the position and movements of the enemy that it was impossible for him to decide how to act; that he wished I would take the detachment under my command, and proceed on the route to Marlborough until I could ascertain correctly the situation of the British army. Having advanced within a short distance of Marlborough, in the neighborhood of Magruder's house, I discovered the advanced picket guard of the enemy, and ascertained from Mr. Magruder or Mr. Tyler, who occupied the house, that some of the British officers had been with him a few moments before, and had informed him that about the middle of the day they should take up their line of march for the City of Washington. I had forgotten to mention that, in addition to my own detachment, consisting of Stull and Davidson's corps, Captain Caldwell, commanding about a dozen of the city cavalry, accompanied me. I had advanced Lieutenant Lear, of this troop, with a corporal and six men, and Lieutenant Wiley, of Stull's company, with a small detachment, to advise of

the approach of the enemy. Occupying the high hill above Magruder's house, from whence I could overlook much of the country toward Marlborough, I made the following disposition. Davidson's company on the *right*, my battery of six pieces occupying the road, and Stull's company occupying the face of the hill on the *left*. I remained but a short time, when Lear and Wiley, with their detachments, returned, informing me that the enemy had taken up their line of march, and were entering the road I occupied. I took my position on the road with my artillery. At that moment Captain Luffborough, who commanded a company of "Orangemen" raised upon the spur of the occasion, arrived with a message from General Winder, saying "my artillery was too important an arm of his army; that he wished me to send it to the rear; and that, if an opportunity offered, I might feel the enemy with Stull's and Davidson's companies." I had hardly ordered the artillery to retire, when the British officers, General Ross being one of them, appeared upon the summit of the hill I had left. I ordered Captain Stull to give those red-coat gentlemen a shot, intending only a platoon to have fired, when the whole company leveled and fired,* the officers retiring on the slope of the hill on the other side. At this moment the advance of the British commenced firing upon Stull's company. The company reloaded and fired, and fell back a short distance, when they advanced a second time in good order, fired another volley, and retired. By this time the enemy was advancing in large numbers. I immediately sent orders for two pieces of artillery to halt, and to form on a commanding piece of ground in the rear. I gave orders to Captain Davidson to occupy a brush fence upon my left, but which order was misunderstood, and he continued to retire in good order. I was detained upon the ground a few moments to secure the safety of Stull's orderly sergeant (Nicholls), who was sun-struck, and with difficulty was saved from capture. I immediately joined the artillery, and by firing two or three discharges I caused the main body of the British army to halt, while they sent out large flanking parties to the right and to the left. Colonel Laval, of the regulars, with two troops of cavalry, joined me. I proposed to him to protect my flanks, while I could keep the enemy at arm's length with my artil-

* Had this company been armed with rifles, those officers must have fallen, and with it the defeat of their project.

lery, for I found they were deficient in that arm. He excused himself by saying his horses were not trained, and that he could do nothing to assist me. I had been promised by General Winder that, in case of meeting with the enemy, I should be re-enforced; that he would order on the troops from Bladensburg, under the command of General Stansbury, to the scene of action. General Winder's correspondence with General Stansbury will account for the non-arrival of the troops under his command. Why General Winder did not order General Smith's brigade, with the marines and flotilla-men, I can not account. I retired to the camp after a fatiguing day's march, and found the troops there drawn up to receive the enemy.

General Ross, who had occupied Centreville, sent back to Marlborough during the night, and dragged up, with his sailors, some two or three pieces of light artillery, the only guns he brought with him to Bladensburg. Another error that my friend, General Winder, committed, was his *forced march* from "Long Old Fields" to Washington, for nothing was to be apprehended on the part of the British attempting an attack on the city by the only bridge that then crossed the Eastern Branch. His true course would have been to have broken up his army in detachments, and to have attacked the enemy in front and on both flanks; his superior command in cavalry, in artillery, and the grounds between Bladensburg and Centreville affording the opportunity for the operation of those two important arms of his army. Smith's brigade, and the troops attached to that brigade, crossed the Eastern Branch Bridge during the night of the 23d. Being much exhausted and fatigued, I had lain down in my tent, when General Winder called upon me, and laid also upon my pallet. The conversation ensued, in which he referred to the failure of Stansbury to join me, and the inefficiency of the troops that he had to command. I was so exhausted with the fatigues of the day that I fell asleep. When I awoke the general was gone. The next morning I received an order to cover the approach of the bridge with twelve pieces of artillery, comprising my own six and Captain Burch's artillery. Having completed the order, I waited upon General Winder to tell him of the impossibility of any attempt on the part of the enemy to cross the bridge; that no military man would attempt to cross such a stream with an army, having no artillery

to drive us from the occupation of the bridge. In a few moments a messenger arrived, announcing that the enemy were on the march to Bladensburg. I was ordered immediately to advance with the same detachment, and that the main body would follow immediately after. On my arrival on the ground which we occupied during the battle, a position was shown me by F. S. Key (acting aid to General Smith), difficult of access, being isolated by numerous and large ravines on one side and a stream on the other, as one of three positions I might occupy with my artillery. This being no position for light artillery, such as I commanded—for, if once placed there, it could not in any way be manœuvred so as to be of any service—I selected a commanding spot on the left of Barney as the second best situation for artillery to command the road, which was reserved for Barney's heavier pieces, having posted Stull and Davidson at the head of a wooded ravine on my left.

The position of the various troops, perhaps, is better known to you than to me, arising from the duties pertaining to you as brigade-major. But, from my recollection (and you can correct any errors), Colonel Cramer's detachment was on the extreme right, between the marines and Eastern Branch; Barney's artillery and Miller's marines occupied the ground from the road to the woods where Cramer was posted; Colonels Hood and Beall were upon the hill in the rear of Barney and Miller; Colonel Magruder's regiment was placed in support of the left flank of Barney's battery; Colonel Scott, with the regulars, Colonel Brent, with the 2d regiment of General Smith's brigade, and Major Warren, with a battalion of Maryland militia, in the rear of my guns; Stull and Davidson at the head of the ravine, on the extreme left.

The firing very soon commenced, after the troops had taken their positions, with Stansbury's brigade, which formed an advanced and separate division of the forces under General Winder, where had been concentrated the commander-in-chief and the several heads of departments. The action with this line continued but a short time, when I saw three or four detachments of the Baltimore volunteers maintaining, with great odds, a conflict with the enemy. They very soon had to yield, and from one of the wounded men who joined me, who said he belonged to Captain Warfield's company, I learned that it was Sterett's and Warfield's

companies, with a detachment of riflemen, and perhaps others. By this time the enemy, in great force, had thrown themselves behind a large frame barn, which stood between them and the position occupied by my battery. I ordered six pieces of artillery, with round shot, to open upon the barn, which drove them from that position. They then marched toward the bridge that crossed a small branch on the road, when, coming within reach of Barney's position, his heavy guns (eighteen-pounders) opened most fatally upon the advancing column of the enemy, my guns keeping up a cross-fire at the same instant, which forced them to retire down the branch toward the woods, when they came in contact with Colonel Cramer's detachment, and, having driven him from the woods, they again occupied the plain in front of Miller and Barney, where they met with the most formidable resistance they encountered during the day. I thought then, and am still of the same opinion, that if General Smith had ordered to the *right*, at that moment, a part of my battery, and the regulars under Colonel Scott, the advance of the enemy would have been repulsed. The great loss of the enemy in this conflict was sustained principally from Barney's and Miller's front-fire and the cross-fire of my artillery. There was a sufficient number of troops in the rear of my guns, if brought into relief of Barney and Miller, to have repulsed the enemy, killed and crippled as they were at that moment.

I visited the wounded British officers after my return to Washington. Colonel Thornton, who commanded the British advance, spoke of its being the heaviest fire from artillery that he had ever experienced. Colonels Thornton and Wood, and Major Browne, all of the 85th, being wounded in the action, were left behind, along with others, after the retreat of the British army. The latter informed me that he was detached to capture my artillery, but, on finding the head of the ravine guarded, he advised his men to lie down until he could be re-enforced. Immediately after, he received a severe wound from a canister-shot, and had no recollection of any thing afterward.

Having retired from the field by orders received through you, after passing the turnpike gate, I was ordered to form the artillery; and Smith's brigade, Hood's and Beall's regiments, with many other troops, again presented a very respectable appearance. I

omitted to mention that I brought from the field four of Barney's wounded men and one of the Baltimore volunteers on my guns. From this last position we were ordered to move to the Capitol. At the north gate, my artillery in advance, General Winder was in conversation with me, when Colonel Monroe and General Armstrong rode up. The latter inquired of General Winder "what he intended to do." General Winder very promptly replied "that the Baltimore troops had gone off in a different direction from Washington; that Barney's guns were captured; and that he was not in a situation to meet the enemy, and that he should retire to the heights above Georgetown." Monroe and Armstrong both bowed and wheeled their horses, and the troops continued their line of march to the neighborhood of Tenleytown. I refer to the conversation there given, having been present, and retaining a *distinct recollection* of what was said on that occasion. General Armstrong, in his Memoirs relating to the War of 1812, says he advised General Winder to occupy the Capitol, with Barney's and Peter's artillery; Colonel Monroe concurred with General Winder in the retrograde movement. In justice to Winder and Monroe, I do not hesitate to say that no such recommendation from General Armstrong took place on that occasion. In justice to General Armstrong, I would say that every thing I required to render my corps efficient was furnished with cheerfulness and promptness: and from the commencement of the time he became Secretary of War to the close of the campaign at Bladensburg, he and Mr. Madison had shown great anxiety to organize the volunteers of the District of Columbia, including artillery, cavalry, infantry, and riflemen under my command, and had actually, at one time, made out the commissions. You know that my position in advance prevented me from knowing what arrangements and other matters relating to its movements were going on with the army. I can only speak of things that came *within my own knowledge*. There are many things and occurrences which are too voluminous for a letter communication. If your object is to write a history of that campaign, let me entreat of you to do justice to *all*, and those that are entitled to merit for honest and faithful services rendered upon that occasion to receive it. From your letter I fear you contemplate censure toward those troops under the command of Stansbury. I had but little opportunity of judging of their ac-

tions, and therefore can not speak advisedly upon the subject. I know that the whole cavalry force of the army, comprising five or six hundred men, well mounted, was with that wing of the army, and that they were never brought into action. The position selected to fight a battle was a most unfortunate one for the American army; a good situation for skirmishing, and for detachments to have engaged in. But the strong arm of General Winder's army was artillery and cavalry, both of which the enemy was deficient in, and an open plain, of all others, ought to have been selected to have met the enemy, when artillery and cavalry could have been usefully employed.

I am laboring at this time under a painful indisposition, and have gone much farther into detail than I intended. Such statements as have come within your own knowledge, and you know to be correct, you can adopt; any thing you believe I have stated to be erroneous, reject. I believe that great injustice was done both to Winder and Armstrong. That both were anxious for the success of our arms, I have no doubt, and that the great errors committed were owing to, perhaps, the conflicting views of the heads of departments and the commander-in-chief.

I do not pretend to speak of the operations of Stansbury's brigade, as but a part of it was in view from the position I occupied; and although the most of those appeared to make no resistance, still there were several companies or detachments that maintained their ground most gallantly, until compelled to retreat by superior force. This occurred before I commenced the action, on the right wing. Nor do I pretend to speak of other troops that were engaged, such as Magruder, Beall, and Hood's regiments, as my own engagements were of such a nature as to preclude my seeing any of the operations except those of Barney and Miller, and the action of my own guns being all occupied at the same time upon the principal body of the opposing troops. Again I must repeat that I have never been able to account for General Smith's not bringing into action the regular troops under Colonel Scott. Nor have I referred to the Vandal course pursued by the enemy: the destruction of the Capitol, President's house and public buildings, some few private buildings, and the destruction of Gales and Seaton's press and type, while they spared the press and type of others within the city. They had a right to destroy the navy-yard

and ships of war, the small fort and laboratory at Greenleaf's Point, cannon, and every thing of a naval and military character, and yet they failed to destroy almost the only foundry (Foxall's) at that time engaged in the manufacture of cannon for the army and navy. Another great error committed by my friend, General Winder, was the removal of the troops in the rear of Georgetown, instead of occupying the situation directly north of the city, from whence he would have been enabled to have acted offensively against the enemy; they, being without cavalry, could not have made any sudden inroad upon his army without being advised of it. Indeed, the organization and equipment of the enemy, totally without cavalry, and but two or three pieces of artillery, rendered their situation alarmingly precarious after they commenced their retreat from the City of Washington, provided the United States cavalry and other troops had been sufficiently near to have commenced operations against them.

I have already said so much, I must decline saying any thing more.

Very respectfully yours, GEORGE PETER.

No. VI.

A VOLUNTEER CORPS FROM VIRGINIA.

Washington, 5th September, 1856.

DEAR COLONEL,—In compliance with your suggestion, I give you a brief notice of some of the events coming under my personal observation forty-two years ago, in connection with the operations of the military of the District of Columbia. I write you on the anniversary of the battles at the White House and Indian Head, a day as nearly similar, in all respects, to the 5th of September, 1814, as it well could be.

The company of volunteer riflemen to which I belonged (though then a mere boy of less than eighteen years) was commanded by Captain George W. Humphreys, of Jefferson County, as gallant an officer and liberal gentleman as I have ever met with. On the afternoon of the 22d of August, 1814, a letter was received at Charlestown, by express, from Captain (afterward General) Henry St. George Tucker, advising that the British troops had been landed from the fleet at Nottingham, and were on their march to

Washington. He invoked him to raise volunteers without delay, and come to the rescue. Thomas Griggs, Jun., an eminent lawyer and influential and popular citizen, mounted a block, and read the letter to the eager crowd who had been waiting for news. A shout, "To the rescue!" immediately went up after a brief address from Mr. Griggs; the drum and fife were sent through the streets to beat up volunteers, and before sunset a company of over fifty men was raised, although the county had then in service, at Norfolk, two or three companies of militia. There was no time to furnish ourselves with uniforms; knapsacks were speedily provided by the ladies of the town; and each man was on the ground at roll-call the next morning On the 23d we marched to Harper's Ferry, eight miles distant, to procure arms and to increase our forces. Here we found a company of about fifty of the armorers and citizens enrolled under the command of the superintendent of the armory (Colonel Stubblefield), and the two companies were consolidated into one, and furnished mostly with the short rifles then in the arsenal, a weapon at that time deemed sure and deadly in the hands of a good marksman. Early on the 24th of August we embarked upon two flour-boats down the Potomac, a stream then rugged and difficult of navigation; but we were in charge of two or three of the Striders, skilful boatmen and enterprising men in every thing they undertook. A few hours after starting we landed to have a regular election of officers, and concluded that the superintendent of the armory and some of his most skilful workmen should return to carry on the manufacture of arms, a duty equally as important as fighting. The following officers were then chosen: George W. Humphreys, captain; Thomas Griggs, James L. Ranson, Joseph Blackburn, and Samuel Russell, lieutenants.

We reached Seneca Creek on the evening of the 24th, hearing distinctly during the day the cannonading at the battle and the explosion at the navy-yard. We saw the light from the burning public buildings, and were satisfied the enemy had possession of the city. This idea was confirmed to us in the morning by somebody from the seat of war, and we forthwith set out on our march to join General Winder at Rockville. During our march we encountered that terrific storm so well remembered by the inhabitants of the District and by the survivors among the invaders.

Hearing that the enemy had gone to Baltimore, we set out in that direction, but soon received orders to join the forces at Washington under General Walter Smith, of whose command we found you (permit me to say) the energetic, skilful, and popular brigade-major. On our entry into Georgetown (and I shall never forget the impression made upon me by the first magnificent view from the heights) we were handsomely entertained by that hospitable old-school gentleman, Washington Bowie, and welcomed by the citizens, our officers and some of the men being well-known to them.

After spending a day or two at Greenleaf's Point (the enemy then in possession of Alexandria), we were stationed, with the troops under General Smith, on Camp (now Observatory) Hill. From Camp Hill we were ordered to march, at 5 o'clock on the evening of Friday, the 2d of September, to join Commodore Porter at the White House, below Mount Vernon, where that gallant officer was busily engaged in erecting a temporary battery on a bluff, so as to command the channel of the Potomac, running within less than fifty yards of the Virginia shore.

The enemy had been lying at anchor for several days after leaving Alexandria, waiting a fair wind to enable him to pass with his prizes, consisting of twenty-one vessels laden with flour and other provisions. His fleet consisted of the frigates Sea-Horse and Euryalus, and five or six bomb ships. The scene was new and exciting to one who had seen so little of "the pomp and circumstance of war," and none of its realities. Our company contained many most expert riflemen—men who not only used, but constructed those deadly weapons with which we were armed; and the corps, though there had been but little time for drill in the field, felt something more than the confidence of raw militiamen, and, I may say, were "eager for the fray." That they did some execution upon the decks of the enemy's vessels the official account of Captain Gordon bears testimony.

Commodore Porter, in his dispatch to the Secretary of the Navy, dated the 7th September, 1814, giving an account of the affair near the White House, describes with some minuteness the operations of the enemy. Among other things he says:

"The two frigates anchored abreast [of the battery], the bombs, sloops, and smaller vessels passed outside them, all pouring into

the battery and neighboring woods a tremendous fire of every description of missiles. In the woods, on the left, a company of riflemen, from Jefferson County, Virginia, under Captain George W. Humphreys, greatly distinguished themselves by a well-directed fire on the enemy's decks, as did a company of militia, under the command of Captain Janney, who was posted by me on the right. The first company lost one man killed, and one sergeant and four privates wounded; the latter, two privates killed."

The private killed in Captain Humphrey's company was David Harris, of Shepherdstown, a most worthy young man, who left a mother and other relatives in that gallant town, celebrated for the quota of fighting men furnished in the Revolutionary era. Sergeant David Humphreys (a merchant of Charlestown, and long an efficient magistrate) had his right arm shattered with a grape-shot, and it was found necessary to have it amputated. Hugh M'Donald was shot through the body with a grape-shot, but survived. William Phielding was wounded in the fleshy part of the thigh; Thomas Stedman had one of his fingers injured, and Lieutenant Blackburn had his cheek grazed with a ball. There are now not fifteen survivors of the company within my recollection.

In his return of killed and wounded (during twenty-three days' operation in the Potomac), Captain Gordon mentions seven killed and thirty-five wounded on board his ships—a much greater loss than we suffered, notwithstanding our imperfect defences.

In commending Lieutenant King, of the Sea-Horse, who got out of his sick-hammock to command while passing the batteries, Captain Gordon states that the first two guns pointed by Lieutenant King disabled each a gun of the enemy. This is true. One of the guns was split to the touch-hole, and another had a wheel of the carriage shattered. The fire of grape and shells was incessant for more than two hours, while the riflemen of Captain Humphreys were down at the water's edge, aiming at the decks and rigging as long as a man was to be seen on either.

My dear sir, I have made this hasty sketch much longer than I intended, but I was encouraged by you to hope that some of the incidents might be worth reciting. I am glad you have undertaken the task of vindicating the reputation of the troops engaged in the ill-fated field of Bladensburg. Better materials for gallant and efficient service than the volunteers and militia of the District I

have never seen any where, and my opportunities have not been limited. Every impartial man, even of the enemy, will admit that the disaster was not to be attributed to the troops. They were not only ready, but eager for a more active participation in the field than was allowed them. The incredulity of General Armstrong, Secretary of War, as to the attempt of the British to make an attack upon Washington prevented the necessary precautions, and the disposition of the troops on the day of battle was any thing else than judicious. The actual commander was paralyzed by the presence of a superior who had taken none of the preliminary measures suggested by military experience.

With great respect, your friend,

JOHN S. GALLAHER,

A private of Captain Humphreys's Riflemen.

Colonel John S. Williams, Washington.

THE END.